

THE TRAGIC MUSE

HENRY JAMES



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VOL. II.



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BY
HENRY JAMES

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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I.

WHILE, after leaving Mrs. Gresham, he was hesitating which way to go and was on the point of hailing a gardener to ask if Mrs. Dallow had been seen, he noticed, as a spot of colour in an expanse of shrubbery, a far-away parasol moving in the direction of the lake. He took his course that way, across the park, and as the bearer of the parasol was strolling slowly it was not five minutes before he had joined her. He went to her soundlessly over the grass (he had been whistling at first, but as he got nearer he stopped), and it was not till he was close to her that she looked round. He had watched her moving as if she were turning things over in her mind, brushing the smooth walks and the clean turf with her dress, slowly making her parasol revolve on her shoulder and carrying in the hand which hung beside her a book which he perceived to be a monthly review.

"I came out to get away," she remarked when he had begun to walk with her.

"Away from me?"

"Ah, that's impossible," said Mrs. Dallow. Then she added: "The day is so nice."

"Lovely weather," Nick dropped. "You want to get away from Mrs. Gresham, I suppose."

Mrs. Dallow was silent a moment. "From everything!"

"Well, I want to get away too."

"It has been such a racket. Listen to the dear birds."

"Yes, our noise isn't so good as theirs," said Nick. "I feel as if I had been married and had shoes and rice thrown after me," he went on. "But not to you, Julia—nothing so good as that."

Mrs. Dallow made no answer to this; she only turned her eyes on the ornamental water which stretched away at their right. In a moment she exclaimed: "How nasty the lake looks!" and Nick recognized in the tone of the words a manifestation of that odd shyness—a perverse stiffness at a moment when she probably only wanted to be soft—which, taken in combination with her other qualities, was so far from being displeasing to him that it represented her nearest approach to extreme charm. *He* was not shy now, for he considered, this morning, that he saw things very straight and in a sense altogether superior and delightful. This enabled him to be generously sorry for his companion, if he were the reason of her being in any degree uncomfortable, and yet left him to enjoy the prettiness of some of the signs by which her discomfort was revealed. He would not insist on anything yet: so he observed that his cousin's standard in lakes was too high, and then talked a little about his mother and the girls, their having gone home, his not having seen

them that morning, Lady Agnes's deep satisfaction in his victory and the fact that she would be obliged to "do something" for the autumn—take a house or something.

"I'll lend her a house," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Oh, Julia, Julia!" Nick exclaimed.

But Mrs. Dallow paid no attention to his exclamation; she only held up her review and said: "See what I have brought with me to read—Mr. Hoppus's article."

"That's right; then *I* sha'n't have to. You'll tell me about it." He uttered this without believing that she had meant or wished to read the article, which was entitled "The Revision of the British Constitution," in spite of her having encumbered herself with the stiff, fresh magazine. He was conscious that she was not in want of such mental occupation as periodical literature could supply. They walked along and then he added: "But *is* that what we are in for—reading Mr. Hoppus? Is that the sort of thing our constituents expect? Or even worse, pretending to have read him when one hasn't? Oh, what a tangled web we weave!"

"People are talking about it. One has to know. It's the article of the month."

Nick looked at his companion askance a moment. "You say things every now and then for which I could kill you. 'The article of the month,' for instance: I could kill you for that."

"Well, kill me!" Mrs. Dallow exclaimed.

"Let me carry your book," Nick rejoined, irrelevantly. The hand in which she held it was on the side of her on which he was walking, and he put out his own hand to take it. But

for a couple of minutes she forbore to give it up, and they held it together, swinging it a little. Before she surrendered it he inquired where she was going.

"To the island," she answered.

"Well, I'll go with you—I'll kill you there."

"The things I say are the right things," said Mrs. Dallow.

"It's just the right things that are wrong. It's because you're so political," Nick went on. "It's your horrible ambition. The woman who has a salon should have read the article of the month. See how one dreadful thing leads to another."

"There are some things that lead to nothing."

"No doubt—no doubt. And how are you going to get over to your island?"

"I don't know."

"Isn't there a boat?"

"I don't know."

Nick had paused a moment, to look round for the boat, but Mrs. Dallow walked on without turning her head. "Can you row?" her companion asked.

"Don't you know I can do everything?"

"Yes, to be sure. That's why I want to kill you. There's the boat."

"Shall you drown me?"

"Oh, let me perish with you!" Nick answered with a sigh. The boat had been hidden from them by the bole of a great tree, which rose from the grass at the water's-edge. It was moored to a small place of embarkation and was large enough to hold as many persons as were likely to wish to visit at once

the little temple in the middle of the lake, which Nick liked because it was absurd and Mrs. Dallow had never had a particular esteem for. The lake, fed by a natural spring, was a liberal sheet of water, measured by the scale of park scenery ; and though its principal merit was that, taken at a distance, it gave a gleam of abstraction to the concrete verdure, doing the office of an open eye in a dull face, it could also be approached without derision on a sweet summer morning, when it made a lapping sound and reflected candidly various things that were probably finer than itself—the sky, the great trees, the flight of birds.

A man of taste, a hundred years before, coming back from Rome, had caused a small ornamental structure to be erected, on artificial foundations, on its bosom, and had endeavoured to make this architectural pleasantry as nearly as possible a reminiscence of the small ruined rotunda which stands on the bank of the Tiber and is declared by *ciceroni* to have been dedicated to Vesta. It was circular, it was roofed with old tiles, it was surrounded by white columns and it was considerably dilapidated. George Dallow had taken an interest in it (it reminded him not in the least of Rome, but of other things that he liked), and had amused himself with restoring it.

“Give me your hand ; sit there, and I’ll ferry you,” Nick Dormer said.

Mrs. Dallow complied, placing herself opposite to him in the boat ; but as he took up the paddles she declared that she preferred to remain on the water—there was too much malice prepense in the temple. He asked her what she meant by that, and she said it was ridiculous to withdraw to an island

a few feet square on purpose to meditate. She had nothing to meditate about which required so much attitude.

"On the contrary, it would be just to change the *pose*. It's what we have been doing for a week that's attitude; and to be for half an hour where nobody's looking and one hasn't to keep it up is just what I wanted to put in an idle, irresponsible day for. I am not keeping it up now—I suppose you've noticed," Nick went on, as they floated and he scarcely dipped the oars.

"I don't understand you," said Mrs. Dallow, leaning back in the boat.

Nick gave no further explanation than to ask in a minute: "Have you people to dinner to-night?"

"I believe there are three or four, but I'll put them off if you like."

"Must you *always* live in public, Julia?" Nick continued.

She looked at him a moment, and he could see that she coloured slightly. "We'll go home—I'll put them off."

"Ah no, don't go home; it's too jolly here. Let them come—let them come, poor wretches!"

"How little you know me, when, ever so many times, I have lived here for months without a creature."

"Except Mrs. Gresham, I suppose."

"I have had to have the house going, I admit."

"You are perfect, you are admirable, and I don't criticize you."

"I don't understand you!" she tossed back.

"That only adds to the generosity of what you have done for me," Nick returned, beginning to pull faster. He bent

over the oars and sent the boat forward, keeping this up for ten minutes, during which they both remained silent. His companion, in her place, motionless, reclining (the seat in the stern was very comfortable), looked only at the water, the sky, the trees. At last Nick headed for the little temple, saying first however: "Sha'n't we visit the ruin?"

"If you like. I don't mind seeing how they keep it."

They reached the white steps which led up to it. Nick held the boat and Mrs. Dallow got out. He fastened the boat and they went up the steps together, passing through the open door.

"They keep it very well," Nick said, looking round. "It's a capital place to give up everything."

"It might do for you to explain what you mean," said Julia, sitting down.

"I mean to pretend for half an hour that I don't represent the burgesses of Harsh. It's charming—it's very delicate work. Surely it has been retouched."

The interior of the pavilion, lighted by windows which the circle of columns was supposed, outside and at a distance, to conceal, had a vaulted ceiling and was occupied by a few pieces of last-century furniture, spare and faded, of which the colours matched with the decoration of the walls. These and the ceiling, tinted and not exempt from indications of damp, were covered with fine mouldings and medallions. It was a very elegant little tea-house.

Mrs. Dallow sat on the edge of a sofa, rolling her parasol and remarking: "You ought to read Mr. Hoppus's article to me."

"Why, is *this* your salon?" asked Nick, smiling.

"Why are you always talking of that? It's an invention of your own."

"But isn't it the idea you care most about?"

Suddenly, nervously, Mrs. Dallow put up her parasol and sat under it, as if she were not quite sensible of what she was doing. "How much you know me! I don't care about anything—that you will ever guess."

Nick Dormer wandered about the room, looking at various things it contained—the odd volumes on the tables, the bits of quaint china on the shelves. "They keep it very well; you've got charming things."

"They're supposed to come over every day and look after them."

"They must come over in force."

"Oh, no one knows."

"It's spick and span. How well you have everything done!"

"I think you've some reason to say so," said Mrs. Dallow. Her parasol was down and she was again rolling it tight.

"But you're right about my not knowing you. Why were you so ready to do so much for me?"

He stopped in front of her and she looked up at him. Her eyes rested on his a minute; then she broke out: "Why do you hate me so?"

"Was it because you like me personally?" Nick asked. "You may think that an odd, or even an odious question; but isn't it natural, my wanting to know?"

"Oh, if you don't know!" Mrs. Dallow exclaimed.

"It's a question of being sure."

"Well, then, if you're not sure—"

"Was it done for me as a friend, as a man?"

"You're not a man; you're a child," said his hostess, with a face that was cold, though she had been smiling the moment before.

"After all, I was a good candidate," Nick went on.

"What do I care for candidates?"

"You're the most delightful woman, Julia," said Nick, sitting down beside her, "and I can't imagine what you mean by my hating you."

"If you haven't discovered that I like you, you might as well."

"Might as well discover it?"

Mrs. Dallow was grave; he had never seen her so pale and never so beautiful. She had stopped rolling her parasol now: her hands were folded in her lap and her eyes were bent on them. Nick sat looking at them too, a trifle awkwardly. "Might as well have hated me," said Mrs. Dallow.

"We have got on so beautifully together, all these days: why shouldn't we get on as well forever and ever?" Mrs. Dallow made no answer, and suddenly Nick said to her: "Ah, Julia, I don't know what you have done to me, but you've done it. You've done it by strange ways, but it will serve. Yes, I hate you," he added, in a different tone, with his face nearer to hers.

"Dear Nick—dear Nick—" she began. But she stopped, for she suddenly felt that he was altogether nearer, nearer than he had ever been to her before, that his arm was round

her, that he was in possession of her. She closed her eyes but she heard him ask: "Why shouldn't it be forever, forever?" in a voice that had, for her ear, such a vibration as no voice had ever had.

"You've done it—you've done it," Nick repeated.

"What do you want of me?" she demanded.

"To stay with me, this way, always."

"Ah, not this way," she answered, softly, but as if in pain, and making an effort, with a certain force, to detach herself.

"This way, then—or this!" He took such insistent advantage of her that he had quickly kissed her. She rose as quickly, but he held her yet, and while he did so he said to her in the same tender tone: "If you'll marry me, why shouldn't it be so simple, so good?" He drew her closer again, too close for her to answer. But her struggle ceased and she rested upon him for a minute, she buried her face on his breast.

"You're hard, and it's cruel!" she then exclaimed, breaking away.

"Hard—cruel?"

"You do it with so little!" And with this, unexpectedly to Nick, Mrs. Dallow burst straight into tears. Before he could stop her she was at the door of the pavilion, as if she wished to quit it immediately. There, however, he stopped her, bending over her while she sobbed, unspeakably gentle with her.

"So little? It's with everything—with everything I have."

"I have done it, you say? What do you accuse me of doing?" Her tears were already over.

"Of making me yours; of being so precious, Julia, so exactly what a man wants, as it seems to me. I didn't know you could," he went on, smiling down at her. "I didn't—no, I didn't."

"It's what I say—that you've always hated me."

"I'll make it up to you."

She leaned on the doorway with her head against the lintel. "You don't even deny it."

"Contradict you *now*? I'll admit it, though it's rubbish, on purpose to live it down."

"It doesn't matter," she said, slowly; "for however much you might have liked me, you would never have done so half as much as I have cared for you."

"Oh, I'm so poor!" Nick murmured, cheerfully.

She looked at him, smiling, and slowly shook her head. Then she declared: "You never can."

"I like that! Haven't I asked you to marry me? When did you ever ask me?"

"Every day of my life! As I say, it's hard—for a proud woman."

"Yes, you're too proud even to answer me."

"We must think of it, we must talk of it."

"Think of it? I've thought of it ever so much."

"I mean together. There are things to be said."

"The principal thing is to give me your word."

Mrs. Dallow looked at him in silence; then she exclaimed: "I wish I didn't adore you!" She went straight down the steps.

"You don't, if you leave me now. Why do you go? It's so charming here, and we are so delightfully alone."

"Detach the boat; we'll go on the water," said Mrs. Dallow.

Nick was at the top of the steps, looking down at her.

"Ah, stay a little—*do* stay!" he pleaded.

"I'll get in myself, I'll put off," she answered.

At this Nick came down and he bent a little to undo the rope. He was close to her, and as he raised his head he felt it caught; she had seized it in her hands and she pressed her lips to the first place they encountered. The next instant she was in the boat.

This time he dipped the oars very slowly indeed; and while, for a period that was longer than it seemed to them, they floated vaguely, they mainly sat and glowed at each other, as if everything had been settled. There were reasons enough why Nick should be happy; but it is a singular fact that the leading one was the sense of having escaped from a great mistake. The final result of his mother's appeal to him the day before had been the idea that he must act with unimpeachable honour. He was capable of taking it as an assurance that Julia had placed him under an obligation which a gentleman could regard only in one way. If *she* had understood it so, putting the vision, or at any rate the appreciation, of a closer tie into everything she had done for him, the case was conspicuously simple and his course unmistakably plain. That is why he had been gay when he came out of the house to look for her: he could be gay when his course was plain. He could be all the gayer, naturally, I must add, that in turning things over, as he had done half the night, what he had turned up oftenest was the recognition that Julia now had a new personal power over him. It was not for nothing that

she had thrown herself personally into his life. She had by her act made him live twice as much, and such a service, if a man had accepted and deeply tasted it, was certainly a thing to put him on his honour. Nick gladly recognized that there was nothing he could do in preference that would not be spoiled for him by any deflection from that point. His mother had made him uncomfortable by intimating to him that Julia was in love with him (he didn't like, in general, to be told such things); but the responsibility seemed easier to carry and he was less shy about it when once he was away from other eyes, with only Julia's own to express that truth and with indifferent nature all around. Besides, what discovery had he made this morning but that he also was in love?

"You must be a very great man," she said to him, in the middle of the lake. "I don't know what you mean about my salon; but I *am* ambitious."

"We must look at life in a large, bold way," Nick replied, resting his oars.

"That's what I mean. If I didn't think you could I wouldn't look at you."

"I could what?"

"Do everything you ought—everything I imagine, I dream of. You *are* clever: you can never make me believe the contrary, after your speech on Tuesday. Don't speak to me! I've seen, I've heard and I know what's in you. I shall hold you to it. You are everything that you pretend not to be."

Nick sat looking at the water while she talked. "Will it always be so amusing?" he asked.

"Will what always be?"

"Why, my career."

"Sha'n't I make it so?"

"It will be yours; it won't be mine," said Nick.

"Ah, don't say that: don't make me out that sort of woman! If they should say it's me, I'd drown myself."

"If they should say what's you?"

"Why, your getting on. If they should say I push you, that I do things for you."

"Well, won't you do them? It's just what I count on."

"Don't be dreadful," said Mrs. Dallow. "It would be loathsome if I were said to be cleverer than you. That's not the sort of man I want to marry."

"Oh, I shall make you work, my dear!"

"Ah, that!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow, in a tone that might come back to a man in after years.

"You will do the great thing, you will make my life delightful," Nick declared, as if he fully perceived the sweetness of it.

"I dare say that will keep me in heart."

"In heart? Why shouldn't you be in heart?" Julia's eyes, lingering on him, searching him, seemed to question him still more than her lips.

"Oh, it will be all right!" cried Nick.

"You'll like success, as well as any one else. Don't tell me—you're not so ethereal!"

"Yes, I shall like success."

"So shall I! And of course I am glad that you'll be able to do things," Mrs. Dallow went on. "I'm glad you'll have things. I'm glad I'm not poor."

"Ah, don't speak of that," Nick murmured. "Only be nice to my mother : we shall make her supremely happy."

"I'm glad I like your people," Mrs. Dallow dropped. "Leave them to me!"

"You're generous—you're noble," stammered Nick.

"Your mother must live at Broadwood ; she must have it for life. It's not at all bad."

"Ah, Julia," her companion replied, "it's well I love you!"

"Why shouldn't you?" laughed Julia ; and after this there was nothing said between them till the boat touched the shore. When she had got out Mrs. Dallow remarked that it was time for luncheon ; but they took no action in consequence, strolling in a direction which was not that of the house. There was a vista that drew them on, a grassy path skirting the foundations of scattered beeches and leading to a stile from which the charmed wanderer might drop into another division of Mrs. Dallow's property. This lady said something about their going as far as the stile ; then the next instant she exclaimed : "How stupid of you—you've forgotten Mr. Hoppus!"

"We left him in the temple of Vesta. Darling, I had other things to think of there."

"I'll send for him," said Mrs. Dallow.

"Lord, can you think of him now?" Nick asked.

"Of course I can—more than ever."

"Shall we go back for him?" Nick inquired, pausing.

Mrs. Dallow made no answer ; she continued to walk, saying they would go as far as the stile. "Of course I know you're fearfully vague," she presently resumed.

"I wasn't vague at all. But you were in such a hurry to get away."

"It doesn't signify. I have another one at home."

"Another summer-house?" suggested Nick.

"A copy of Mr. Hoppus."

"Mercy, how you go in for him! Fancy having two!"

"He sent me the number of the magazine; and the other is the one that comes every month."

"Every month—I see," said Nick, in a manner justifying considerably Mrs. Dallow's charge of vagueness. They had reached the stile and he leaned over it, looking at a great mild meadow and at the browsing beasts in the distance.

"Did you suppose they come every day?" asked Mrs. Dallow.

"Dear no, thank God!" They remained there a little; he continued to look at the animals and before long he added: "Delightful English pastoral scene. Why do they say it won't paint?"

"Who says it won't?"

"I don't know—some of them. It will in France; but somehow it won't here."

"What are you talking about?" Mrs. Dallow demanded.

Nick appeared unable to satisfy her on this point; at any rate instead of answering her directly he said: "Is Broadwood very charming?"

"Have you never been there? It shows how you've treated me. We used to go there in August. George had ideas about it," added Mrs. Dallow. She had never affected not to speak of her late husband, especially with Nick, whose kinsman in

a manner he had been and who had liked him better than some others did.

"George had ideas about a great many things."

Julia Dallow appeared to be conscious that it would be rather odd on such an occasion to take this up. It was even odd in Nick to have said it. "Broadwood is just right," she rejoined at last. "It's neither too small nor too big, and it takes care of itself. There's nothing to be done: you can't spend a penny."

"And don't you want to use it?"

"We can go and stay with *them*," said Mrs. Dallow.

"They'll think I bring them an angel." And Nick covered her hand, which was resting on the stile, with his own large one.

"As they regard you yourself as an angel they will take it as natural of you to associate with your kind."

"Oh, *my* kind!" murmured Nick, looking at the cows.

Mrs. Dallow turned away from him as if she were starting homeward, and he began to retrace his steps with her. Suddenly she said: "What did you mean that night in Paris?"

"That night?"

"When you came to the hotel with me, after we had all dined at that place with Peter."

"What did I mean?"

"About your caring so much for the fine arts. You seemed to want to frighten me."

"Why should you have been frightened? I can't imagine what I had in my head: not now."

"You *are* vague," said Julia, with a little flush.

"Not about the great thing."

"The great thing?"

"That I owe you everything an honest man has to offer. How can I care about the fine arts now?"

Mrs. Dallow stopped, looking at him. "Is it because you think you *owe* it—" and she paused, still with the heightened colour in her cheek; then she went on—"that you have spoken to me as you did there?" She tossed her head toward the lake.

"I think I spoke to you because I couldn't help it."

"You *are* vague." And Mrs. Dallow walked on again.

"You affect me differently from any other woman."

"Oh, other women! Why shouldn't you care about the fine arts now?" she added.

"There will be no time. All my days and my years will be none too much to do what you expect of me."

"I don't expect you to give up anything. I only expect you to do more."

"To do more I must do less. I have no talent."

"No talent?"

"I mean for painting."

Mrs. Dallow stopped again. "That's odious! You *have*—you must."

Nick burst out laughing. "You're altogether delightful. But how little you know about it—about the honourable practice of any art!"

"What do you call practice? You'll have all our things—you'll live in the midst of them."

"Certainly I shall enjoy looking at them, being so near them."

"Don't say I've taken you away then."

"Taken me away?"

"From the love of art. I like them myself now, poor George's treasures. I didn't, of old, so much, because it seemed to me he made too much of them—he was always talking."

"Well, I won't talk," said Nick.

"You may do as you like—they're yours."

"Give them to the nation," Nick went on.

"I like that! When we have done with them."

"We shall have done with them when your Vandykes and Moronis have cured me of the delusion that I may be of *their* family. Surely that won't take long."

"You shall paint *me*," said Julia.

"Never, never, never!" Nick uttered these words in a tone that made his companion stare; and he appeared slightly embarrassed at this result of his emphasis. To relieve himself he said, as they had come back to the place beside the lake where the boat was moored: "Sha'n't we really go and fetch Mr. Hoppus?"

She hesitated. "You may go; I won't, please."

"That's not what I want."

"Oblige me by going. I'll wait here." With which Mrs. Dallow sat down on the bench attached to the little landing.

Nick, at this, got into the boat and put off; he smiled at her as she sat there watching him. He made his short journey, disembarked and went into the pavilion; but when he came out with the object of his errand he saw that Mrs. Dallow had quitted her station—she had returned to the house

without him. He rowed back quickly, sprang ashore and followed her with long steps. Apparently she had gone fast; she had almost reached the door when he overtook her.

“Why did you basely desert me?” he asked, stopping her there.

“I don’t know. Because I’m so happy.”

“May I tell mother?”

“You may tell her she shall have Broadwood.”

II.

NICK lost no time in going down to see Mr. Carteret, to whom he had written immediately after the election and who had answered him in twelve revised pages of historical parallel. He used often to envy Mr. Carteret's leisure, a sense of which came to him now afresh, in the summer evening, as he walked up the hill toward the quiet house where enjoyment, for him, had ever been mingled with a vague oppression. He was a little boy again, under Mr. Carteret's roof—a little boy on whom it had been duly impressed that in the wide, plain, peaceful rooms he was not to "touch." When he paid a visit to his father's old friend there were in fact many things—many topics—from which he instinctively kept his hands. Even Mr. Chayter, the immortal blank butler, who was so like his master that he might have been a twin brother, helped to remind him that he must be good. Mr. Carteret seemed to Nick a very grave person, but he had the sense that Chayter thought him rather frivolous.

Our young man always came on foot from the station, leaving his portmanteau to be carried: the direct way was steep and he liked the slow approach, which gave him a chance to look about the place and smell the new-mown hay. At this season the air was full of it—the fields were so near

that it was in the small, empty streets. Nick would never have thought of rattling up to Mr. Carteret's door. It had an old brass plate with his name, as if he had been the principal surgeon. The house was in the high part, and the neat roofs of other houses, lower down the hill, made an immediate prospect for it, scarcely counting however, for the green country was just below these, familiar and interpenetrating, in the shape of small but thick-tufted gardens. There was something growing in all the intervals, and the only disorder of the place was that there were sometimes oats on the pavements. A crooked lane, very clean, with cobblestones, opened opposite to Mr. Carteret's house and wandered towards the old abbey: for the abbey was the secondary fact of Beauclere, after Mr. Carteret. Mr. Carteret sometimes went away and the abbey never did; yet somehow it was most of the essence of the place that it possessed the proprietor of the squarest of the square red houses, with the finest of the arched hall-windows, in three divisions, over the widest of the last-century doorways. You saw the great abbey from the doorstep, beyond the gardens of course, and in the stillness you could hear the flutter of the birds that circled round its huge, short towers. The towers had never been finished, save as time finishes things, by perpetuating their incompleteness. There is something right in old monuments that have been wrong for centuries: some such moral as that was usually in Nick's mind as an emanation of Beauclere, when he looked at the magnificent line of the roof, riding the sky and unsurpassed for length.

When the door with the brass plate was opened and Mr.

Chayter appeared in the middle distance (he always advanced just to the same spot, like a prime minister receiving an ambassador), Nick saw anew that he would be wonderfully like Mr. Carteret if he had had an expression. He did not permit himself this freedom; never giving a sign of recognition, often as the young man had been at the house. He was most attentive to the visitor's wants, but apparently feared that if he allowed a familiarity it might go too far. There was always the same question to be asked—had Mr. Carteret finished his nap? He usually had not finished it, and this left Nick what he liked—time to smoke a cigarette in the garden or even, before dinner, to take a turn about the place. He observed now, every time he came, that Mr. Carteret's nap lasted a little longer. There was each year a little more strength to be gathered for the ceremony of dinner: this was the principal symptom—almost the only one—that the clear-cheeked old gentleman gave of not being so fresh as of yore. He was still wonderful for his age. To-day he was particularly careful: Chayter went so far as to mention to Nick that four gentlemen were expected to dinner—an effusiveness perhaps partly explained by the circumstance that Lord Bottomley was one of them.

The prospect of Lord Bottomley was somehow not stirring; it only made the young man say to himself with a quick, thin sigh: "This time I *am* in for it!" And he immediately had the unpolitical sense again that there was nothing so pleasant as the way the quiet bachelor house had its best rooms on the big garden, which seemed to advance into them through their wide windows and ruralize their dullness.

“I expect it will be a latish eight, sir,” said Mr. Chayter, superintending in the library the production of tea on a large scale. Everything at Mr. Carteret’s appeared to Nick to be on a larger scale than anywhere else—the tea-cups, the knives and forks, the door-handles, the chair-backs, the legs of mutton, the candles and the lumps of coal: they represented and apparently exhausted the master’s sense of pleasing effect, for the house was not otherwise decorated. Nick thought it really hideous, but he was capable at the same time of extracting a degree of amusement from anything that was strongly characteristic, and Mr. Carteret’s interior expressed a whole view of life. Our young man was generous enough to find a hundred instructive intimations in it even at the time it came over him (as it always did at Beauclere) that this was the view he himself was expected to take. Nowhere were the boiled eggs at breakfast so big or in such big receptacles; his own shoes, arranged in his room, looked to him vaster there than at home. He went out into the garden and remembered what enormous strawberries they should have for dinner. In the house there was a great deal of Landseer, of oilcloth, of woodwork painted and “grained.”

Finding that he should have time before the evening meal, or before Mr. Carteret would be able to see him, he quitted the house and took a stroll toward the abbey. It covered acres of ground on the summit of the hill, and there were aspects in which its vast bulk reminded him of the ark left high and dry upon Ararat. At least it was the image of a great wreck, of the indestructible vessel of a faith, washed up there by a storm centuries before. The injury of time added

to this appearance—the infirmities around which, as he knew, the battle of restoration had begun to be fought. The cry had been raised to save the splendid pile, and the counter-cry by the purists, the sentimentalists, whatever they were, to save it from being saved. They were all exchanging compliments in the morning papers.

Nick sauntered round the church—it took a good while; he leaned against low things and looked up at it while he smoked another cigarette. It struck him as a great pity it should be touched: so much of the past was buried there that it was like desecrating, like digging up a grave. And the years seemed to be letting it down so gently: why jostle the elbow of slow-fingering time? The fading afternoon was exquisitely pure; the place was empty; he heard nothing but the cries of several children, which sounded sweet, who were playing on the flatness of the very old tombs. He knew that this would inevitably be one of the topics at dinner, the restoration of the abbey; it would give rise to a considerable deal of orderly debate. Lord Bottomley, oddly enough, would probably oppose the expensive project, but on grounds that would be characteristic of him even if the attitude were not. Nick's nerves, on this spot, always knew what it was to be soothed; but he shifted his position with a slight impatience as the vision came over him of Lord Bottomley's treating a question of æsthetics. It was enough to make one want to take the other side, the idea of having the same taste as his lordship: one would have it for such different reasons.

Dear Mr. Carteret would be deliberate and fair all round, and would, like his noble friend, exhibit much more architectural

knowledge than he, Nick, possessed : which would not make it a whit less droll to our young man that an artistic idea, so little really assimilated, should be broached at that table and in that air. It would remain so outside of their minds and their minds would remain so outside of it. It would be dropped at last however, after half an hour's gentle worrying, and the conversation would incline itself to public affairs. Mr. Carteret would find his natural level—the production of anecdote in regard to the formation of early ministries. He knew more than any one else about the personages of whom certain cabinets would have consisted if they had not consisted of others. His favourite exercise was to illustrate how different everything might have been from what it was, and how the reason of the difference had always been somebody's inability to "see his way" to accept the view of somebody else—a view usually, at the time, discussed, in strict confidence, with Mr. Carteret, who surrounded his actual violation of that confidence, thirty years later, with many precautions against scandal. In this retrospective vein, at the head of his table, the old gentleman always enjoyed an audience or at any rate commanded a silence, often profound. Every one left it to some one else to ask another question ; and when by chance some one else did so every one was struck with admiration at any one's being able to say anything. Nick knew the moment when he himself would take a glass of a particular port and, surreptitiously looking at his watch, perceive it was ten o'clock. It might as well be 1830.

All this would be a part of the suggestion of leisure that invariably descended upon him at Beauclere—the image of a

sloping shore where the tide of time broke with a ripple too faint to be a warning. But there was another admonition that was almost equally sure to descend upon his spirit in a summer hour, in a stroll about the grand abbey ; to sink into it as the light lingered on the rough red walls and the local accent of the children sounded soft in the churchyard. It was simply the sense of England—a sort of apprehended revelation of his country. The dim annals of the place appeared to be in the air (foundations bafflingly early, a great monastic life, wars of the Roses, with battles and blood in the streets, and then the long quietude of the respectable centuries, all corn-fields and magistrates and vicars), and these things were connected with an emotion that arose from the green country, the rich land so infinitely lived in, and laid on him a hand that was too ghostly to press and yet somehow too urgent to be light. It produced a throb that he could not have spoken of, it was so deep, and that was half imagination and half responsibility. These impressions melted together and made a general appeal, of which, with his new honours as a legislator, he was the sentient subject. If he had a love for this particular scene of life, might it not have a love for him and expect something of him? What fate could be so high as to grow old in a national affection? What a grand kind of reciprocity, making mere soreness of all the balms of indifference!

The great church was still open, and he turned into it and wandered a little in the twilight, which had gathered earlier there. The whole structure, with its immensity of height and distance, seemed to rest on tremendous facts—facts of achievement and endurance—and the huge Norman pillars to loom

through the dimness like the ghosts of heroes. Nick was more struck with its human than with its divine significance, and he felt the oppression of his conscience as he walked slowly about. It was in his mind that nothing in life was really clear, all things were mingled and charged, and that patriotism might be an uplifting passion even if it had to allow for Lord Bottomley and for Mr. Carteret's blindness on certain sides. Presently he perceived it was nearly half-past seven, and as he went back to his old friend's he could not have told you whether he was in a state of gladness or of gloom.

"Mr. Carteret will be in the drawing-room at a quarter to eight, sir," Chayter said ; and Nick, as he went to his chamber, asked himself what was the use of being a member of Parliament if one was still sensitive to an intimation on the part of such a functionary that one ought already to have begun to dress. Chayter's words meant that Mr. Carteret would expect to have a little comfortable conversation with him before dinner. Nick's usual rapidity in dressing was however quite adequate to the occasion, and his host had not appeared when he went down. There were flowers in the unfeminine saloon, which contained several paintings, in addition to the engravings of pictures of animals ; but nothing could prevent its reminding Nick of a comfortable committee-room.

Mr. Carteret presently came in, with his gold-headed stick, a laugh like a series of little warning coughs and the air of embarrassment that our young man always perceived in him at first. He was nearly eighty, but he was still shy—he laughed a great deal, faintly and vaguely, at nothing, as if to make up for the seriousness with which he took some jokes.

He always began by looking away from his interlocutor, and it was only little by little that his eyes came round; after which their limpid and benevolent blue made you wonder why they should ever be circumspect. He was clean shaven and had a long upper lip. When he had seated himself he talked of "majorities" and showed a disposition to converse on the general subject of the fluctuation of Liberal gains. He had an extraordinary memory for facts of this sort and could mention the figures relating to elections in innumerable places in particular years. To many of these facts he attached great importance, in his simple, kindly, presupposing way; returning five minutes later and correcting himself if he had said that some one, in 1857, had had 6014 instead of 6004.

Nick always felt a great hypocrite as he listened to him, in spite of the old man's courtesy—a thing so charming in itself that it would have been grossness to speak of him as a bore. The difficulty was that he took for granted all kinds of positive assent, and Nick, in his company, found himself immersed in an atmosphere of tacit pledges which constituted the very medium of intercourse and yet made him draw his breath a little in pain when, for a moment, he measured them. There would have been no hypocrisy at all if he could have regarded Mr. Carteret as a mere sweet spectacle, the last or almost the last illustration of a departing tradition of manners. But he represented something more than manners; he represented what he believed to be morals and ideas—ideas as regards which he took your personal deference (not discovering how natural that was) for participation. Nick liked to think that his father, though ten years younger, had found it congruous

to make his best friend of the owner of so nice a nature : it gave a softness to his feeling for that memory to be reminded that Sir Nicholas had been of the same general type—a type so pure, so disinterested, so anxious about the public good. Just so it endeared Mr. Carteret to him to perceive that he considered his father had done a definite work, prematurely interrupted, which had been an absolute benefit to the people of England. The oddity was however that though both Mr. Carteret's aspect and his appreciation were still so fresh, this relation of his to his late distinguished friend made the latter appear to Nick even more irrecoverably dead. The good old man had almost a vocabulary of his own, made up of old-fashioned political phrases and quite untainted with the new terms, mostly borrowed from America ; indeed, his language and his tone made those of almost any one who might be talking with him appear by contrast rather American. He was, at least nowadays, never severe or denunciatory ; but sometimes in telling an anecdote he dropped such an expression as “the rascal said to me,” or such an epithet as “the vulgar dog.”

Nick was always struck with the rare simplicity (it came out in his countenance) of one who had lived so long and seen so much of affairs that draw forth the passions and perversities of men. It often made him say to himself that Mr. Carteret must have been very remarkable to achieve with his means so many things requiring cleverness. It was as if experience, though coming to him in abundance, had dealt with him with such clean hands as to leave no stain and had never provoked him to any general reflection. He had never proceeded in any ironic way from the particular to the general ; certainly he

had never made a reflection upon anything so unparliamentary as Life. He would have questioned the taste of such an excrescence, and if he had encountered it on the part of another would have regarded it as a kind of French toy, with the uses of which he was unacquainted. Life, for him, was a purely practical function, not a question of phrasing. It must be added that he had, to Nick's perception, his variations—his back windows opening into grounds more private. That was visible from the way his eye grew cold and his whole polite face rather austere when he listened to something that he didn't agree with or perhaps even understand; as if his modesty did not in strictness forbid the suspicion that a thing he didn't understand would have a probability against it. At such times there was something a little deadly in the silence in which he simply waited, with a lapse in his face, without helping his interlocutor out. Nick would have been very sorry to attempt to communicate to him a matter which he probably would not understand. This cut off of course a multitude of subjects.

The evening passed exactly as Nick had foreseen, even to the rather early dispersal of the guests, two of whom were "local" men, earnest and distinct, though not particularly distinguished. The third was a young, slim, uninitiated gentleman whom Lord Bottomley brought with him and concerning whom Nick was informed beforehand that he was engaged to be married to the Honourable Jane, his lordship's second daughter. There were recurrent allusions to Nick's victory, as to which he had the fear that he might appear to exhibit less interest in it than the company did. He took energetic precautions against this and felt repeatedly a little

spent with them, for the subject always came up once more. Yet it was not as his but as theirs that they liked the triumph. Mr. Carteret took leave of him for the night directly after the other guests had gone, using at this moment the words that he had often used before—

“You may sit up to any hour you like. I only ask that you don’t read in bed.”

III.

NICK's little visit was to terminate immediately after luncheon the following day: much as the old man enjoyed his being there he would not have dreamed of asking for more of his time now that it had such great public uses. He liked infinitely better that his young friend should be occupied with parliamentary work than only occupied in talking about it with him. Talk about it however was the next best thing, as on the morrow after breakfast Mr. Carteret showed Nick that he considered. They sat in the garden, the morning being warm, and the old man had a table beside him, covered with the letters and newspapers that the post had brought. He was proud of his correspondence, which was altogether on public affairs, and proud in a manner of the fact that he now dictated almost everything. That had more in it of the statesman in retirement, a character indeed not consciously assumed by Mr. Carteret, but always tacitly attributed to him by Nick, who took it rather from the pictorial point of view: remembering on each occasion only afterwards that though he was in retirement he had not exactly been a statesman. A young man, a very sharp, handy young man, came every morning at ten o'clock and wrote for him till lunch-time. The young man

had a holiday to-day, in honour of Nick's visit—a fact the mention of which led Nick to make some not particularly sincere speech about *his* being ready to write anything if Mr. Carteret were at all pressed.

“Ah, but your own budget : what will become of that ?” the old gentleman objected, glancing at Nick's pockets as if he was rather surprised not to see them stuffed out with documents in split envelopes. His visitor had to confess that he had not directed his letters to meet him at Beaucelere : he should find them in town that afternoon. This led to a little homily from Mr. Carteret which made him feel rather guilty ; there was such an implication of neglected duty in the way the old man said : “ You won't do them justice—you won't do them justice.” He talked for ten minutes, in his rich, simple, urbane way, about the fatal consequences of getting behind. It was his favourite doctrine that one should always be a little before ; and his own eminently regular respiration seemed to illustrate the idea. A man was certainly before who had so much in his rear.

This led to the bestowal of a good deal of general advice as to the mistakes to avoid at the beginning of a parliamentary career ; as to which Mr. Carteret spoke with the experience of one who had sat for fifty years in the House of Commons. Nick was amused, but also mystified and even a little irritated by his talk : it was founded on the idea of observation and yet Nick was unable to regard Mr. Carteret as an observer. “ He doesn't observe *me*,” he said to himself ; “ if he did he would see, he wouldn't think—” And the end of this private cogitation was a vague impatience of all the things his

venerable host took for granted. He didn't see any of the things that Nick saw. Some of these latter were the light touches of the summer morning scattered through the sweet old garden. The time passed there a good deal as if it were sitting still, with a plaid under its feet, while Mr. Carteret distilled a little more of the wisdom that he had drawn from his fifty years. This immense term had something fabulous and monstrous for Nick, who wondered whether it were the sort of thing his companion supposed *he* had gone in for. It was not strange Mr. Carteret should be different; he might originally have been more—to himself Nick was not obliged to phrase it: what our young man meant was more of what it was perceptible to him that his host was not. Should even he, Nick, be like that at the end of fifty years? What Mr. Carteret was so good as to expect for him was that he should be much more distinguished; and wouldn't this exactly mean much more like that? Of course Nick heard some things that he had heard before; as for instance the circumstances that had originally led the old man to settle at Beauclere. He had been returned for that locality (it was his second seat), in years far remote, and had come to live there because he then had a conscientious conviction (modified indeed by later experience) that a member should be constantly resident. He spoke of this now, smiling rosily, as he might have spoken of some wild aberration of his youth; yet he called Nick's attention to the fact that he still so far clung to his conviction as to hold (though of what might be urged on the other side he was perfectly aware), that a representative should at least be as resident as possible. This gave Nick an opening for

saying something that had been on and off his lips all the morning.

"According to that I ought to take up my abode at Harsh."

"In the measure of the convenient I should not be sorry to see you do it."

"It ought to be rather convenient," Nick replied, smiling. "I've got a piece of news for you which I've kept, as one keeps that sort of thing (for it's very good), till the last." He waited a little, to see if Mr. Carteret would guess, and at first he thought nothing would come of this. But after resting his young-looking eyes on him for a moment the old man said—

"I should indeed be very happy to hear that you have arranged to take a wife."

"Mrs. Dallow has been so good as to say that she will marry me," Nick went on.

"That is very suitable. I should think it would answer."

"It's very jolly," said Nick. It was well that Mr. Carteret was not what his guest called observant, or he might have thought there was less gaiety in the sound of this sentence than in the sense.

"Your dear father would have liked it."

"So my mother says."

"And *she* must be delighted."

"Mrs. Dallow, do you mean?" Nick asked.

"I was thinking of your mother. But I don't exclude the charming lady. I remember her as a little girl. I must have seen her at Windrush. Now I understand the zeal and amiability with which she threw herself into your canvass."

"It was her they elected," said Nick.

"I don't know that I have ever been an enthusiast for political women, but there is no doubt that, in approaching the mass of electors, a graceful, affable manner, the manner of the real English lady, is a force not to be despised."

"Mrs. Dallow is a real English lady, and at the same time she's a very political woman," Nick remarked.

"Isn't it rather in the family? I remember once going to see her mother in town and finding the leaders of both parties sitting with her."

"My principal friend, of the others, is her brother Peter. I don't think he troubles himself much about that sort of thing."

"What does he trouble himself about?" Mr. Carteret inquired, with a certain gravity.

"He's in the diplomatic service; he's a secretary in Paris."

"That may be serious," said the old man.

"He takes a great interest in the theatre; I suppose you'll say that may be serious too," Nick added, laughing.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Carteret, looking as if he scarcely understood. Then he continued: "Well, it can't hurt you."

"It can't hurt me?"

"If Mrs. Dallow takes an interest in your interests."

When a man's in my situation he feels as if nothing could hurt him."

"I'm very glad you're happy," said Mr. Carteret. He rested his mild eyes on our young man, who had a sense of seeing in them for a moment the faint ghost of an old story, the dim revival of a sentiment that had become the memory of a memory. This glimmer of wonder and envy, the

revelation of a life intensely celibate, was for an instant infinitely touching. Nick had always had a theory, suggested by a vague allusion from his father, who had been discreet, that their benevolent friend had had in his youth an unhappy love-affair which had led him to forswear for ever the commerce of woman. What remained in him of conscious renunciation gave a throb as he looked at his bright companion, who proposed to take the matter so much the other way. "It's good to marry, and I think it's right. I've not done right, I know it. If she's a good woman it's the best thing," Mr. Carteret went on. "It's what I've been hoping for you. Sometimes I've thought of speaking to you."

"She's a very good woman," said Nick.

"And I hope she's not poor." Mr. Carteret spoke with exactly the same blandness.

"No, indeed, she's rich. Her husband, whom I knew and liked, left her a large fortune."

"And on what terms does she enjoy it?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Nick.

Mr. Carteret was silent a moment. "I see. It doesn't concern you. It needn't concern you," he added in a moment.

Nick thought of his mother, at this, but he remarked: "I dare say she can do what she likes with her money."

"So can I, my dear young friend," said Mr. Carteret.

Nick tried not to look conscious, for he felt a significance in the old man's face. He turned his own everywhere but towards it, thinking again of his mother. "That must be very pleasant, if one has any."

"I wish you had a little more."

"I don't particularly care," said Nick.

"Your marriage will assist you; you can't help that," Mr. Carteret went on. "But I should like you to be under obligations not quite so heavy."

"Oh, I'm so obliged to her for caring for me!"

"That the rest doesn't count? Certainly it's nice of her to like you. But why shouldn't she? Other people do."

"Some of them make me feel as if I abused it," said Nick, looking at his host. "That is, they don't make me, but I feel it," he added, correcting himself.

"I have no son," said Mr. Carteret. "Sha'n't you be very kind to her?" he pursued. "You'll gratify her ambition."

"Oh, she thinks me cleverer than I am."

"That's because she's in love," hinted the old gentleman, as if this were very subtle. "However, you must be as clever as we think you. If you don't prove so—" And he paused, with his folded hands.

"Well, if I don't?" asked Nick.

"Oh, it won't do—it won't do," said Mr. Carteret, in a tone his companion was destined to remember afterwards: "I say I have no son," he continued; "but if I had had one he should have risen high."

"It's well for me such a person doesn't exist. I shouldn't easily have found a wife."

"He should have gone to the altar with a little money in his pocket."

"That would have been the least of his advantages, sir."

"When are you to be married?" Mr. Carteret asked.

“Ah, that’s the question. Mrs. Dallow won’t say.”

“Well, you may consider that when it comes off I will make you a settlement.”

“I feel your kindness more than I can say,” Nick replied ; “but that will probably be the moment when I shall be least conscious of wanting anything.”

“You’ll appreciate it later—you’ll appreciate it very soon. I shall like you to appreciate it,” Mr. Carteret went on, as if he had a just vision of the way a young man of a proper spirit should feel. Then he added : “Your father would have liked you to appreciate it.”

“Poor father !” Nick exclaimed vaguely, rather embarrassed, reflecting on the oddity of a position in which the ground for holding up his head as the husband of a rich woman would be that he had accepted a present of money from another source. It was plain that he was not fated to go in for independence ; the most that he could treat himself to would be dependence that was duly grateful. “How much you expect of me !” he pursued, with a grave face.

“It’s only what your father did. He so often spoke of you, I remember, at the last, just after you had been with him alone—you know I saw him then. He was greatly moved by his interview with you, and so was I by what he told me of it. He said he should live on in you—he should work in you. It has always given me a very peculiar feeling, if I may use the expression, about you.”

“The feelings are indeed peculiar, dear Mr. Carteret, which take so munificent a form. But you do—oh, you do—expect too much.”

"I expect you to repay me!" said the old man gaily. "As for the form, I have it in my mind."

"The form of repayment?"

"No, no—of settlement."

"Ah, don't talk of it now," said Nick, "for, you see, nothing else is settled. No one has been told except my mother. She has only consented to my telling you."

"Lady Agnes, do you mean?"

"Ah, no; dear mother would like to publish it on the house-tops. She's so glad—she wants us to have it over tomorrow. But Julia wishes to wait. Therefore kindly mention it for the present to no one."

"My dear boy, at this rate there is nothing to mention. What does Julia want to wait for?"

"Till I like her better—that's what she says."

"It's the way to make you like her worse. Hasn't she your affection?"

"So much so that her delay makes me exceedingly unhappy."

Mr. Carteret looked at his young friend as if he didn't strike him as very unhappy; but he demanded: "Then what more does she want?" Nick laughed out at this, but he perceived his host had not meant it as an epigram; while the latter went on: "I don't understand. You're engaged or you're not engaged."

"She is, but I am not. That's what she says about it. The trouble is she doesn't believe in me."

"Doesn't she love you then?"

"That's what I ask her. Her answer is that she loves me

only too well. She's so afraid of being a burden to me that she gives me my freedom till I've taken another year to think."

"I like the way you talk about other years!" Mr. Carteret exclaimed. "You had better do it while I'm here to bless you."

"She thinks I proposed to her because she got me in for Harsh," said Nick.

"Well, I'm sure it would be a very pretty return."

"Ah, she doesn't believe in me," Nick murmured.

"Then I don't believe in her."

"Don't say that—don't say that. She's a very rare creature. But she's proud, shy, suspicious."

"Suspicious of what?"

"Of everything. She thinks I'm not persistent."

"Persistent?"

"She can't believe I shall arrive at true eminence."

"A good wife should believe what her husband believes," said Mr. Carteret.

"Ah, unfortunately I don't believe it either."

Mr. Carteret looked serious. "Your dear father did."

"I think of that—I think of that," Nick replied. "Certainly it will help me. If I say we're engaged," he went on, "it's because I consider it so. She gives me my liberty, but I don't take it."

"Does she expect you to take back your word?"

"That's what I ask her. *She* never will. Therefore we're as good as tied."

"I don't like it," said Mr. Carteret, after a moment. "I

don't like ambiguous, uncertain situations. They please me much better when they are definite and clear." The retreat of expression had been sounded in his face—the aspect it wore when he wished not to be encouraging. But after an instant he added in a tone softer than this: "Don't disappoint me, my dear boy."

"Disappoint you?"

"I've told you what I want to do for you. See that the conditions come about promptly in which I *may* do it. Are you sure that you do everything to satisfy Mrs. Dallow?" Mr. Carteret continued.

"I think I'm very nice to her," Nick protested. "But she's so ambitious. Frankly speaking, it's a pity—for her—that she likes me."

"She can't help that."

"Possibly. But isn't it a reason for taking me as I am? What she wants to do is to take me as I may be a year hence."

"I don't understand if, as you say, even then she won't take back her word," said Mr. Carteret.

"If she doesn't marry me I think she'll never marry again at all."

"What then does she gain by delay?"

"Simply this, as I make it out—that she'll feel she has been very magnanimous. She won't have to reproach herself with not having given me a chance to change."

"To change? What does she think you liable to do?"

Nick was silent a minute. "I don't know!" he said, not at all candidly.

"Everything has altered: young people in my day looked

at these questions more naturally," Mr. Carteret declared. "A woman in love has no need to be magnanimous. If she is, she isn't in love," he added shrewdly.

"Oh, Mrs. Dallow's safe—she's safe," Nick smiled.

"If it were a question between you and another gentleman one might comprehend. But what does it mean, between you and nothing?"

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," Nick returned. "The trouble is that she doesn't know what she has got hold of."

"Ah, if you can't make it clear to her!"

"I'm such a humbug," said the young man. His companion stared, and he continued: "I deceive people without in the least intending it."

"What on earth do you mean? Are you deceiving me?"

"I don't know—it depends on what you think."

"I think you're flighty," said Mr. Carteret, with the nearest approach to sternness that Nick had ever observed in him. "I never thought so before."

"Forgive me; it's all right. I'm not frivolous; that I affirm I'm not."

"You *have* deceived me if you are."

"It's all right," Nick stammered, with a blush.

"Remember your name—carry it high."

"I will—as high as possible."

"You've no excuse. Don't tell me, after your speeches at Harsh!" Nick was on the point of declaring again that he was a humbug, so vivid was his inner sense of what *he* thought of his factitious public utterances, which had the cursed property of creating dreadful responsibilities and importunate

credulities for him. If *he* was "clever," what fools many other people were! He repressed his impulse, and Mr. Carteret pursued: "If, as you express it, Mrs. Dallow doesn't know what she has got hold of, won't it clear the matter up a little if you inform her that the day before your marriage is definitely settled to take place you will come into something comfortable?"

A quick vision of what Mr. Carteret would be likely to regard as something comfortable flitted before Nick, but it did not prevent him from replying: "Oh, I'm afraid that won't do any good. It would make her like you better, but it wouldn't make her like me. I'm afraid she won't care for any benefit that comes to me from another hand than hers. Her affection is a very jealous sentiment."

"It's a very peculiar one!" sighed Mr. Carteret. "Mine's a jealous sentiment too. However, if she takes it that way don't tell her."

"I'll let you know as soon as she comes round," said Nick.

"And you'll tell your mother," said Mr. Carteret. "I shall like her to know."

"It will be delightful news to her. But she's keen enough already."

"I know that. I may mention now that she has written to me," the old man added.

"So I suspected."

"We have corresponded on the subject," Mr. Carteret continued to confess. "My view of the advantageous character of such an alliance has entirely coincided with hers."

"It was very good-natured of you to leave me to speak first," said Nick.

"I should have been disappointed if you hadn't. I don't like all you have told me. But don't disappoint me now."

"Dear Mr. Carteret!" Nick exclaimed.

"I won't disappoint *you*," the old man went on, looking at his big, old-fashioned watch.

IV.

AT first Peter Sherringham thought of asking to be transferred to another post and went so far, in London, as to take what he believed to be good advice on the subject. The advice perhaps struck him as the better for consisting of a strong recommendation to do nothing so foolish. Two or three reasons were mentioned to him why such a request would not, in the particular circumstances, raise him in the esteem of his superiors, and he promptly recognized their force. It next appeared to him that it might help him (not with his superiors, but with himself,) to apply for an extension of leave; but on further reflection he remained convinced that though there are some dangers before which it is perfectly consistent with honour to flee, it was better for every one concerned that he should fight this especial battle on the spot. During his holiday his plan of campaign gave him plenty of occupation. He refurbished his arms, rubbed up his strategy, laid out his lines of defence.

There was only one thing in life that his mind had been very much made up to, but on this question he had never wavered: he would get on to the utmost in his profession. It was a point on which it was perfectly lawful to be unamiable to others—to be vigilant, eager, suspicious, selfish. He had

not in fact been unamiable to others, for his affairs had not required it: he had got on well enough without hardening his heart. Fortune had been kind to him and he had passed so many competitors on the way that he could forswear jealousy and be generous. But he had always flattered himself that his hand would not falter on the day he should find it necessary to drop bitterness into his cup. This day would be sure to dawn, for no career was all clear water to the end; and then the sacrifice would find him ready. His mind was familiar with the thought of a sacrifice: it is true that nothing could be plain in advance about the occasion, the object, the victim. All that was tolerably definite was that the propitiatory offering would have to be some cherished enjoyment. Very likely indeed this enjoyment would be associated with the charms of another person—a probability pregnant with the idea that such charms would have to be dashed out of sight. At any rate it never had occurred to Sherringham that he himself might be the sacrifice. You had to pay to get on; but at least you borrowed from others to do it. When you couldn't borrow you didn't get on: for what was the situation in life in which you met the whole requisition yourself?

Least of all had it occurred to our friend that the wrench might come through his interest in that branch of art on which Nick Dormer had rallied him. The beauty of a love of the theatre was precisely that it was a passion exercised on the easiest terms. This was not the region of responsibility. It had the discredit of being sniffed at by the austere; but if it was not, as they said, a serious field, was not the compensation just that you could not be seriously entangled in it? Sherring-

ham's great advantage, as he regarded the matter, was that he had always kept his taste for the drama quite in its place. His facetious cousin was free to pretend that it sprawled through his life; but this was nonsense, as any unprejudiced observer of that life would unhesitatingly attest. There had not been the least sprawling, and his fancy for the art of Garrick had never worn the proportions of an eccentricity. It had never drawn down from above anything approaching a reprimand, a remonstrance, a remark. Sherringham was positively proud of his discretion; for he was a little proud of what he did know about the stage. Trifling for trifling there were plenty of his fellows who had in their lives private infatuations much sillier and less confessable. Had he not known men who collected old invitation-cards (hungry for those of the last century), and others who had a secret passion for shuffleboard? His little weaknesses were intellectual—they were a part of the life of the mind. All the same on the day they showed a symptom of interfering they should be plucked off with a turn of the wrist.

Sherringham scented interference now, and interference in rather an invidious form. It might be a bore, from the point of view of the profession, to find one's self, as a critic of the stage, in love with a *coquaine*; but it was a much greater bore to find one's self in love with a young woman whose character remained to be estimated. Miriam Rooth was neither fish nor flesh: one had with her neither the guarantees of one's own class nor the immunities of hers. What was hers, if one came to that? A certain puzzlement about this very point was part of the fascination which she had ended by throwing over

him. Poor Sherringham's scheme for getting on had contained no proviso against falling in love, but it had embodied an important clause on the subject of surprises. It was always a surprise to fall in love, especially if one were looking out for it; so this contingency had not been worth official paper. But it became a man who respected the service he had undertaken for the State to be on his guard against predicaments from which the only issue was the rigour of matrimony. An ambitious diplomatist would probably be wise to marry, but only with his eyes very much open. That was the fatal surprise—to be led to the altar in a dream. Sherringham's view of the proprieties attached to such a step was high and strict; and if he held that a man in his position was, especially as the position improved, essentially a representative of the greatness of his country, he considered that the wife of such a personage would exercise in her degree (for instance, at a foreign court) a function no less symbolic. She would always be, in short, a very important quantity, and the scene was strewn with illustrations of this general truth. She might be such a help and she might be such a blight that common prudence required that one should test her in advance. Sherringham had seen women in the career who were stupid or vulgar make a mess of things—it was enough to wring your heart. Then he had his positive idea of the perfect ambassadress, the full-blown lily of the future; and with this idea Miriam Rooth presented no analogy whatever.

The girl had described herself with characteristic directness as “all right”; and so she might be, so she assuredly was: only all right for what? He had divined that she was not

sentimental—that whatever capacity she might have for responding to a devotion or for desiring it was at any rate not in the direction of vague philandering. With him certainly she had no disposition to philander. Sherringham was almost afraid to think of this, lest it should beget in him a rage convertible mainly into caring for her more. Rage or no rage, it would be charming to be in love with her if there were no complications ; but the complications were in advance just what was clearest in the business. He was perhaps cold-blooded to think of them ; but it must be remembered that they were the particular thing which his training had equipped him for dealing with. He was at all events not too cold-blooded to have, for the two months of his holiday, very little inner vision of anything more abstract than Miriam's face. The desire to see it again was as pressing as thirst ; but he tried to teach himself the endurance of the traveller in the desert. He kept the Channel between them, but his spirit moved every day an inch nearer to her, until (and it was not long) there were no more inches left. The last thing he expected the future ambassadress to have been was a *fille de théâtre*. The answer to this objection was of course that Miriam was not yet so much of one but that he could easily head her off. Then came worrying retorts to that, chief among which was the sense that to his artistic conscience heading her off would be simple shallowness. The poor girl had a right to her chance, and he should not really alter anything by taking it away from her ; for was she not the artist to the tips of her tresses (the ambassadress never in the world), and would she not take it out in something else if one

were to make her deviate? So certain was that irrepressible deviltry to insist ever on its own.

Besides, *could* one make her deviate? If she had no disposition to philander, what was his warrant for supposing that she could be corrupted into respectability? How could the career (*his* career) speak to a nature which had glimpses, as vivid as they were crude, of such a different range, and for which success meant quite another sauce to the dish? Would the brilliancy of marrying Peter Sherringham be such a bribe to relinquishment? How could he think so without fatuity—how could he regard himself as a high prize? Relinquishment of the opportunity to exercise a rare talent was not, in the nature of things, an easy effort to a young lady who was conceited as well as ambitious. Besides, she might eat her cake and have it—might make her fortune both on the stage and in the world. Successful actresses had ended by marrying dukes, and was not that better than remaining obscure and marrying a commoner? There were moments when Sherringham tried to think that Miriam's talent was not a force to reckon with; there was so little to show for it as yet that the caprice of believing in it would perhaps suddenly leave her. But his suspicion that it was real was too uneasy to make such an experiment peaceful, and he came back moreover to his deepest impression—that of her being of the turn of mind for which the only consistency is talent. Had not Madame Carré said at the last that she could “do anything”? It was true that if Madame Carré had been mistaken in the first place she might also be mistaken in the second. But in this latter case she would be mistaken with him, and such an error would be too like a truth.

I ought possibly to hesitate to say how much Sherringham felt the discomfort, for him, of the advantage that Miriam had of him—the advantage of her presenting herself in a light which rendered any passion that he might entertain an implication of duty as well as of pleasure. Why there should be this implication was more than he could say; sometimes he declared to himself that he was superstitious for seeing it. He didn't know, he could scarcely conceive of another case of the same general type in which he would have seen it. In foreign countries there were very few ladies of Miss Rooth's intended profession who would not have regarded it as too strong an order that to console them for not being admitted into drawing-rooms they should have no offset but the exercise of a virtue in which no one would believe. Because in foreign countries actresses were not admitted into drawing-rooms: that was a pure English drollery, ministering equally little to histrionics and to the tone of these resorts. Did the sanctity which to his imagination made it a burden to have to reckon with Miriam come from her being English? Sherringham could remember cases in which that privilege operated as little as possible as a restriction. It came a great deal from Mrs. Rooth, in whom he apprehended depths of calculation as to what she might achieve for her daughter by "working" the idea of a blameless life. Her romantic turn of mind would not in the least prevent her from regarding that idea as a substantial capital, to be laid out to the best worldly advantage. Miriam's essential irreverence was capable, on a pretext, of making mince-meat of it—that he was sure of; for the only capital she recognized was the talent which some

day managers and agents would outbid each other in paying for. But she was a good-natured creature; she was fond of her mother, would do anything to oblige (that might work in all sorts of ways), and would probably like the loose slippers of blamelessness quite as well as the high standards of the opposite camp.

Sherringham, I may add, had no desire that she should indulge a different preference: it was foreign to him to compute the probabilities of a young lady's misbehaving for his advantage (that seemed to him definitely base), and he would have thought himself a blackguard if, professing a tenderness for Miriam, he had not wished the thing that was best for her. The thing that was best for her would no doubt be to become the wife of the man to whose suit she should incline her ear. That this would be the best thing for the gentleman in question was however a very different matter, and Sherringham's final conviction was that it would never do for him to act the part of that hypothetic personage. He asked for no removal and no extension of leave, and he proved to himself how well he knew what he was about by never addressing a line, during his absence, to the Hôtel de la Garonne. He would simply go straight and inflict as little injury upon Peter Sherringham as upon any one else. He remained away to the last hour of his privilege and continued to act lucidly in having nothing to do with the mother and daughter for several days after his return to Paris.

It was when this discipline came to an end, one afternoon after a week had passed, that he felt most the force of the reference that has just been made to Mrs. Rooth's private

reckonings. He found her at home alone, writing a letter under the lamp, and as soon as he came in she cried out that he was the very person to whom the letter was addressed. She could bear it no longer; she had permitted herself to reproach him with his terrible silence—to ask why he had quite forsaken them. It was an illustration of the way in which her visitor had come to regard her that he rather disbelieved than believed this description of the crumpled papers lying on the table. He was not sure even that he believed that Miriam had just gone out. He told her mother how busy he had been all the while he was away and how much time in particular he had had to give, in London, to seeing on her daughter's behalf the people connected with the theatres.

“Ah, if you pity me, tell me that you've got her an engagement!” Mrs. Rooth cried, clasping her hands.

“I took a great deal of trouble; I wrote ever so many notes, sought introductions, talked with people—such impossible people some of them. In short I knocked at every door, I went into the question exhaustively.” And he enumerated the things he had done, imparted some of the knowledge he had gathered. The difficulties were serious, and even with the influence he could command (such as it was) there was very little to be achieved in face of them. Still he had gained ground: there were two or three fellows, men with small theatres, who had listened to him better than the others, and there was one in particular whom he had a hope he might really have interested. From him he had extracted certain merciful assurances: he would see Miriam, he would listen to her, he would do for her what he could.

The trouble was that no one would lift a finger for a girl unless she were known, and yet that she never could become known until innumerable fingers were lifted. You couldn't go into the water unless you could swim, and you couldn't swim until you had been in the water.

"But new performers appear; they get theatres, they get audiences, they get notices in the newspapers," Mrs. Rooth objected. "I know of these things only what Miriam tells me. It's no knowledge that I was born to."

"It's perfectly true; it's all done with money."

"And how do they come by money?" Mrs. Rooth asked, candidly.

"When they're women people give it to them."

"Well, what people, now?"

"People who believe in them."

"As you believe in Miriam?"

Sherringham was silent a moment. "No, rather differently. A poor man doesn't believe anything in the same way that a rich man does."

"Ah, don't call yourself poor!" groaned Mrs. Rooth.

"What good would it do me to be rich?"

"Why, you could take a theatre; you could do it all yourself."

"And what good would that do me?"

"Why, don't you delight in her genius?" demanded Mrs. Rooth.

"I delight in her mother. You think me more disinterested than I am," Sherringham added, with a certain soreness of irritation.

"I know why you didn't write!" Mrs. Rooth declared, archly.

"You must go to London," Peter said, without heeding this remark.

"Ah, if we could only get there it would be a relief. I should draw a long breath. There at least I know where I am, and what people are. But here one lives on hollow ground!"

"The sooner you get away the better," Sherringham went on.

"I know why you say that."

"It's just what I'm explaining."

"I couldn't have held out if I hadn't been so sure of Miriam," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Well, you needn't hold out any longer."

"Don't *you* trust her?" asked Sherringham's hostess.

"Trust her?"

"You don't trust yourself. That's why you were silent, why we might have thought you were dead, why we might have perished ourselves."

"I don't think I understand you; I don't know what you're talking about," Sherringham said. "But it doesn't matter."

"Doesn't it? Let yourself go: why should you struggle?" the old woman inquired.

Her unexpected insistence annoyed her visitor, and he was silent again, looking at her, on the point of telling her that he didn't like her tone. But he had his tongue under such control that he was able presently to say, instead of this—

and it was a relief for him to give audible voice to the reflection: "It's a great mistake, either way, for a man to be in love with an actress. Either it means nothing serious, and what's the use of that? or it means everything, and that's still more delusive."

"Delusive?"

"Idle, unprofitable."

"Surely a pure affection is its own reward," Mrs. Rooth rejoined, with soft reasonableness.

"In such a case how can it be pure?"

"I thought you were talking of an English gentleman," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Call the poor fellow whatever you like: a man with his life to lead, his way to make, his work, his duties, his career to attend to. If it means nothing, as I say, the thing it means least of all is marriage."

"Oh, my own Miriam!" murmured Mrs. Rooth.

"On the other hand fancy the complication if such a man marries a woman who's on the stage."

Mrs. Rooth looked as if she were trying to follow. "Miriam isn't on the stage yet."

"Go to London and she soon will be."

"Yes, and then you'll have your excuse."

"My excuse?"

"For deserting us altogether."

Sherringham broke into laughter at this, the tone was so droll. Then he rejoined: "Show me some good acting and I won't desert you."

"Good acting? Ah, what is the best acting compared

with the position of an English lady? If you'll take her as she is you may have her," Mrs. Rooth suddenly added.

"As she is, with all her ambitions unassuaged?"

"To marry *you*—might not that be an ambition?"

"A very paltry one. Don't answer for her, don't attempt that," said Sherringham. "You can do much better."

"Do you think *you* can?" smiled Mrs. Rooth.

"I don't want to; I only want to let it alone. She's an artist; you must give her her head," Peter went on. "You must always give an artist his head."

"But I have known great ladies who were artists. In English society there is always a field."

"Don't talk to me of English society! Thank heaven, in the first place, I don't live in it. Do you want her to give up her genius?"

"I thought you didn't care for it."

"She'd say 'No, I thank you, dear mamma.'"

"My gifted child!" Mrs. Rooth murmured.

"Have you ever proposed it to her?"

"Proposed it?"

"That she should give up trying."

Mrs. Rooth hesitated, looking down. "Not for the reason you mean. We don't talk about love," she simpered.

"Then it's so much less time wasted. Don't stretch out your hand to the worse when it may some day grasp the better," Sherringham pursued. Mrs. Rooth raised her eyes at him as if she recognized the force there might be in that, and he added: "Let her blaze out, let her look about her. Then you may talk to me if you like."

"It's very puzzling," the old woman remarked, artlessly.

Sherringham laughed again; then he said: "Now don't tell me I'm not a good friend."

"You are indeed—you're a very noble gentleman. That's just why a quiet life with you—"

"It wouldn't be quiet for me!" Sherringham broke in. "And that's not what Miriam was made for."

"Don't say that, for my precious one!" Mrs. Rooth quavered.

"Go to London—go to London," her visitor repeated.

Thoughtfully, after an instant, she extended her hand and took from the table the letter on the composition of which he had found her engaged. Then with a quick movement she tore it up. "That's what Mr. Dashwood says."

"Mr. Dashwood?"

"I forgot you don't know him. He's the brother of that lady we met the day you were so good as to receive us; the one who was so kind to us—Mrs. Lovick."

"I never heard of him."

"Don't you remember that she spoke of him and Mr. Lovick didn't seem very kind about him? She told us that if he were to meet us—and she was so good as to insinuate that it would be a pleasure to him to do so—he might give us, as she said, a tip."

Sherringham indulged in a visible effort to recollect. "Yes, he comes back to me. He's an actor."

"He's a gentleman too," said Mrs. Rooth.

"And you've met him and he *has* given you a tip?"

"As I say, he wants us to go to London."

"I see, but even I can tell you that."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Rooth; "but *he* says he can help us."

"Keep hold of him then, if he's in the business."

"He's a perfect gentleman," said Mrs. Rooth. "He's immensely struck with Miriam."

"Better and better. Keep hold of him."

"Well, I'm glad you don't object," Mrs. Rooth smiled.

"Why should I object?"

"You don't consider us as *all* your own?"

"My own? Why, I regard you as the public's—the world's."

Mrs. Rooth gave a little shudder. "There's a sort of chill in that. It's grand, but it's cold. However, I needn't hesitate then to tell you that it's with Mr. Dashwood that Miriam has gone out."

"Why hesitate, gracious heaven?" But in the next breath Sherringham asked: "Where has she gone?"

"You don't like it!" laughed Mrs. Rooth.

"Why should it be a thing to be enthusiastic about?"

"Well, he's charming, and *I* trust him."

"So do I," said Sherringham.

"They've gone to see Madame Carré."

"She has come back then?"

"She was expected back last week. Miriam wants to show her how she has improved."

"And *has* she improved?"

"How can I tell—with my mother's heart?" asked Mrs. Rooth. "I don't judge; I only wait and pray. But Mr. Dashwood thinks she's wonderful."

"That's a blessing. And when did he turn up?"

"About a fortnight ago. We met Mrs. Lovick at the English church, and she was so good as to recognize us and speak to us. She said she had been away with her children, or she would have come to see us. She had just returned to Paris."

"Yes, I've not yet seen her," said Sherringham. "I see Lovick, but he doesn't talk of his brother-in-law."

"I didn't, that day, like his tone about him," Mrs. Rooth observed. "We walked a little way with Mrs. Lovick and she asked Miriam about her prospects and if she were working. Miriam said she had no prospects."

"That was not very nice to *me*," Sherringham interrupted.

"But when you had left us in black darkness, where *were* our prospects?"

"I see; it's all right. Go on."

"Then Mrs. Lovick said her brother was to be in Paris a few days and she would tell him to come and see us. He arrived, she told him and he came. *Voilà!*" said Mrs. Rooth.

"So that now (so far as *he* is concerned) Miss Rooth has prospects?"

"He isn't a manager unfortunately."

"Where does he act?"

"He isn't acting just now; he has been abroad. He has been to Italy, I believe, and he is just stopping here on his way to London."

"I see; he *is* a perfect gentleman," said Sherringham.

"Ah, you're jealous of him."

"No, but you're trying to make me so. The more competitors there are for the glory of bringing her out, the better for her."

"Mr. Dashwood wants to take a theatre," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Then perhaps he's our man."

"Oh, if you'd help him?" cried Mrs. Rooth.

"Help him?"

"Help him to help us."

"We'll all work together; it will be very jolly," said Sherringham gaily. "It's a sacred cause, the love of art, and we shall be a happy band. Dashwood's his name?" he added in a moment. "Mrs. Lovick wasn't a Dashwood."

"It's his *nom de théâtre*—Basil Dashwood. Do you like it?" Mrs. Rooth inquired.

"You say that as Miriam might do: her talent is catching."

"She's always practising—always saying things over and over, to seize the tone. I have her voice in my ears. He wants *her* not to have any."

"Not to have any?"

"Any *nom de théâtre*. He wants her to use her own; he likes it so much. He says it will do so well—you can't better it."

"He's a capital adviser," said Sherringham, getting up. "I'll come back to-morrow."

"I won't ask you to wait till they return, they may be so long," Mrs. Rooth replied.

"Will he come back with her?" Sherringham inquired, smoothing his hat.

"I hope so, at this hour. With my child in the streets I tremble. We don't live in cabs, as you may easily suppose."

"Did they go on foot?" Sherringham continued.

"Oh yes; they started in high spirits."

"And is Mr. Basil Dashwood acquainted with Madame Carré?"

"Oh no, but he longed to be introduced to her; he implored Miriam to take him. Naturally she wishes to oblige him. She's very nice to him—if he can do anything."

"Quite right; that's the way."

"And she also wanted him to see what she can do for the great critic," Mrs. Rooth added.

"The great critic?"

"I mean that terrible old woman in the red wig."

"That's what I should like to see too," said Sherringham.

"Oh, she has gone ahead; she is pleased with herself. 'Work, work, work,' said Madame Carré. Well, she has worked, worked, worked. That's what Mr. Dashwood is pleased with even more than with other things."

"What do you mean by other things?"

"Oh, her genius and her fine appearance."

"He approves of her fine appearance? I ask because you think he knows what will take."

"I know why you ask," said Mrs. Rooth. "He says it will be worth hundreds of thousands to her."

"That's the sort of thing I like to hear," Sherringham rejoined. "I'll come in to-morrow," he repeated.

"And shall you mind if Mr. Dashwood's here?"

"Does he come every day?"

"Oh, they're always at it."

"Always at it?"

"Why, she acts to him—every sort of thing—and he says if it will do."

“How many days has he been here then?”

Mrs. Rooth reflected. “Oh, I don’t know. Since he turned up they’ve passed so quickly.”

“So far from ‘minding’ it I’m eager to see him,” Sherringham declared; “and I can imagine nothing better than what you describe—if he isn’t an ass.”

“Dear me, if he isn’t clever you must tell us: we can’t afford to be deceived!” Mrs. Rooth exclaimed, innocently and plaintively. “What do we know—how can we judge?” she added.

Sherringham hesitated, with his hand on the latch. “Oh, I’ll tell you what I think of him!”

V.

WHEN he got into the street he looked about him for a cab, but he was obliged to walk some distance before encountering one. In this little interval he saw no reason to modify the determination he had formed in descending the steep staircase of the Hôtel de la Garonne ; indeed the desire which prompted it only quickened his pace. He had an hour to spare and he too would go to see Madame Carré. If Miriam and her companion had proceeded to the Rue de Constantinople on foot he would probably reach the house as soon as they. It was all quite logical : he was eager to see Miriam—that was natural enough ; and he had admitted to Mrs. Rooth that he was keen on the subject of Mrs. Lovick's theatrical brother, in whom such effective aid might perhaps reside. To catch Miriam really revealing herself to the old actress (since that was her errand), with the jump she believed herself to have taken, would be a very happy stroke, the thought of which made her benefactor impatient. He presently found his cab and, as he bounded in, bade the coachman drive fast. He learned from Madame Carré's portress that her illustrious *locataire* was at home and that a lady and a gentleman had gone up some time before.

In the little antechamber, after he was admitted, he heard a

high voice issue from the salon, and, stopping a moment to listen, perceived that Miriam was already launched in a recitation. He was able to make out the words, all the more that before he could prevent the movement the maid-servant who had let him in had already opened the door of the room (one of the wings of it, there being, as in most French doors, two pieces), before which, within, a heavy curtain was suspended. Miriam was in the act of rolling out some speech from the English poetic drama—

“For I am sick and capable of fears,
Oppressed with wrongs and therefore full of fears.”

He recognized one of the great tirades of Shakespeare's Constance and saw she had just begun the magnificent scene at the beginning of the third act of *King John*, in which the passionate, injured mother and widow sweeps in wild organ-tones up and down the scale of her irony and wrath. The curtain concealed him and he lurked there for three minutes after he had motioned to the *femme de chambre* to retire on tiptoe. The trio in the salon, absorbed in the performance, had apparently not heard his entrance or the opening of the door, which was covered by the girl's splendid declamation. Sherringham listened intently, he was so arrested by the spirit with which she attacked her formidable verses. He had needed to hear her utter but half a dozen of them to comprehend the long stride she had taken in his absence; they told him that she had leaped into possession of her means. He remained where he was till she arrived at—

“Then speak again ; not all thy former tale,
But this one word, whether thy tale be true.”

This apostrophe, being briefly responded to in another voice, gave him time quickly to raise the curtain and show himself, passing into the room with a "Go on, go on!" and a gesture earnestly deprecating a stop.

Miriam, in the full swing of her part, paused but for an instant and let herself ring out again, while Peter sank into the nearest chair and she fixed him with her illumined eyes, or rather with those of the raving Constance. Madame Carré, buried in a chair, kissed her hand to him, and a young man who stood near the girl giving her the cue stared at him over the top of a little book. "Admirable—magnificent; go on," Sherringham repeated—"go on to the end of the scene—do it all!" Miriam flushed a little, but he immediately discovered that she had no personal emotion in seeing him again; the cold passion of art had perched on her banner and she listened to herself with an ear as vigilant as if she had been a Paganini drawing a fiddle-bow. This effect deepened as she went on, rising and rising to the great occasion, moving with extraordinary ease and in the largest, clearest style on the dizzy ridge of her idea. That she had an idea was visible enough and that the whole thing was very different from all that Sherringham had hitherto heard her attempt. It belonged quite to another class of effort; she seemed now like the finished statue lifted from the ground to its pedestal. It was as if the sun of her talent had risen above the hills and she knew that she was moving, that she would always move, in its guiding light. This conviction was the one artless thing that glimmered like a young joy through the tragic mask of Constance, and Sherringham's heart beat faster as he caught

it in her face. It only made her appear more intelligent ; and yet there had been a time when he had thought her stupid ! Intelligent was the whole spirit in which she carried the scene, making him cry to himself from point to point : “ How she feels it—how she sees it—how she creates it ! ”

He looked at moments at Madame Carré and perceived that she had an open book in her lap, apparently a French prose version, brought by her visitors, of the play ; but she never either glanced at him or at the volume ; she only sat screwing into the girl her hard bright eyes, polished by experience like fine old brasses. The young man uttering the lines of the other speakers was attentive in another degree ; he followed Miriam in his own copy of the play, to be sure not to miss the cue ; but he was elated and expressive, was evidently even surprised ; he coloured and smiled, and when he extended his hand to assist Constance to rise, after Miriam, acting out her text, had seated herself grandly on “ the huge, firm earth,” he bowed over her as obsequiously as if she had been his veritable sovereign. He was a very good-looking young man, tall, well-proportioned, straight-featured and fair, of whom manifestly the first thing to be said on any occasion was that he looked remarkably like a gentleman. He carried this appearance, which proved inveterate and importunate, to a point that was almost a negation of its spirit ; that is it might have been a question whether it could be in good taste to wear any character, even that particular one, so much on one’s sleeve. It was literally on his sleeve that this young man partly wore his own ; for it resided considerably in his attire and especially in a certain close-fitting dark

blue frock-coat (a miracle of a fit), which moulded his young form just enough and not too much and constituted (as Sherringham was destined to perceive later) his perpetual uniform or badge. It was not till later that Sherringham began to feel exasperated by Basil Dashwood's "type" (the young stranger was of course Basil Dashwood), and even by his blue frock-coat, the recurrent, unvarying, imperturbable "good form" of his aspect. This unprofessional air ended by striking the observer as the profession that he had adopted, and was indeed (so far as had as yet been indicated) his theatrical capital, his main qualification for the stage.

The powerful, ample manner in which Miriam handled her scene produced its full impression, the art with which she surmounted its difficulties, the liberality with which she met its great demand upon the voice, and the variety of expression that she threw into a torrent of objurgation. It was a real composition, studded with passages that called a suppressed "Brava!" to the lips and seeming to show that a talent capable of such an exhibition was capable of anything.

"But thou art fair, and at thy birth, dear boy,
Nature and Fortune join'd to make thee great :
Of Nature's gifts thou mayst with lilies boast,
And with the half-blown rose."

As Miriam turned to her imagined child with this exquisite apostrophe (she addressed Mr. Dashwood as if he were playing Arthur, and he lowered his book, dropped his head and his eyes and looked handsome and ingenuous), she opened at a stroke to Sherringham's vision a prospect that they would yet see her express tenderness better even than anything else.

Her voice was enchanting in these lines, and the beauty of her performance was that while she uttered the full fury of the part she missed none of its poetry.

“Where did she get hold of that—where did she get hold of that?” Sherringham wondered while his whole sense vibrated. “She hadn’t got hold of it when I went away.” And the assurance flowed over him again that she had found the key to her box of treasures. In the summer, during their weeks of frequent meeting, she had only fumbled with the lock. One October day, while he was away, the key had slipped in, had fitted, or her finger at last had touched the right spring, and the capricious casket had flown open.

It was during the present solemnity that Sherringham, excited by the way she came out and with a hundred startled ideas about her wheeling through his mind, was for the first time and most vividly visited by a perception that ended by becoming frequent with him—that of the perfect presence of mind, unconfused, unhurried by emotion, that any artistic performance requires and that all, whatever the instrument, require in exactly the same degree: the application, in other words, clear and calculated, crystal-firm as it were, of the idea conceived in the glow of experience, of suffering, of joy. Sherringham afterwards often talked of this with Miriam, who however was not able to present him with a neat theory of the subject. She had no knowledge that it was publicly discussed; she was just practically on the side of those who hold that at the moment of production the artist cannot have his wits too much about him. When Peter told her there were people who maintained that in such a crisis he must lose

himself in the flurry she stared with surprise and then broke out: "Ah, the idiots!" She eventually became in her judgments, in impatience and the expression of contempt, very free and absolutely irreverent.

"What a splendid scolding!" Sherringham exclaimed when, on the entrance of the Pope's legate, her companion closed the book upon the scene. Peter pressed his lips to Madame Carré's finger-tips; the old actress got up and held out her arms to Miriam. The girl never took her eyes off Sherringham while she passed into Madame Carré's embrace and remained there. They were full of their usual sombre fire, and it was always the case that they expressed too much anything that they expressed at all; but they were not defiant nor even triumphant now—they were only deeply explicative; they seemed to say: "That's the sort of thing I meant; that's what I had in mind when I asked you to try to do something for me." Madame Carré folded her pupil to her bosom, holding her there as the old marquise in a *comédie de mœurs* might, in the last scene, have held her god-daughter the *ingénue*.

"Have you got me an engagement?" Miriam asked of Sherringham. "Yes, he has done something splendid for me," she went on to Madame Carré, resting her hand caressingly on one of the actress's while the old woman discoursed with Mr. Dashwood, who was telling her in very pretty French that he was tremendously excited about Miss Rooth. Madame Carré looked at him as if she wondered how he appeared when he was calm and how, as a dramatic artist, he expressed that condition.

"Yes, yes, something splendid, for a beginning," Sherring-

ham answered, radiantly, recklessly ; feeling now only that he would say anything, do anything, to please her. He spent on the spot, in imagination, his last penny.

"It's such a pity you couldn't follow it ; you would have liked it so much better," Mr. Dashwood observed to his hostess.

"Couldn't follow it ? Do you take me for *une sottie* ?" the celebrated artist cried. "I suspect I followed it *de plus près que vous, monsieur* !"

"Ah, you see the language is so awfully fine," Basil Dashwood replied, looking at his shoes.

"The language ? Why, she rails like a fish-wife. Is that what you call language ? Ours is another business."

"If you understood—if you understood you would see the greatness of it," Miriam declared. And then, in another tone, "Such delicious expressions !"

"*On dit que c'est très fort*. But who can tell if you really say it ?" Madame Carré demanded.

"Ah, *par exemple*, I can !" Sherringham exclaimed.

"Oh, you—you're a Frenchman."

"Couldn't he tell if he were not ?" asked Basil Dashwood.

The old woman shrugged her shoulders. "He wouldn't know."

"That's flattering to me."

"Oh, you—don't you pretend to complain," Madame Carré said. "I prefer *our* imprecations—those of Camille," she went on. "They have the beauty *des plus belles choses*."

"I can say them too," Miriam broke in.

"*Insolente* !" smiled Madame Carré. "Camille doesn't squat down on the floor in the middle of them."

“For grief is proud and makes his owner stoop.
To me and to the state of my great grief
Let kings assemble,”

Miriam quickly declaimed. “Ah, if you don’t feel the way she makes a throne of it!”

“It’s really tremendously fine, *chère madame*,” Sherringham said. “There’s nothing like it.”

“*Vous êtes insupportables*,” the old woman answered. “Stay with us. I’ll teach you Phèdre.”

“Ah, Phædra—Phædra!” Basil Dashwood vaguely ejaculated, looking more gentlemanly than ever.

“You have learned all I have taught you, but where the devil have you learned what I haven’t taught you?” Madame Carré went on.

“I’ve worked—I have; you’d call it work—all through the bright, late summer, all through the hot, dull, empty days. I’ve battered down the door—I did hear it crash one day. But I’m not so very good yet: I’m only in the right direction.”

“*Malicieuse!*” murmured Madame Carré.

“Oh, I can beat that,” the girl went on.

“Did you wake up one morning and find you had grown a pair of wings?” Sherringham asked. “Because that’s what the difference amounts to—you really soar. Moreover you’re an angel,” he added, charmed with her unexpectedness, the good-nature of her forbearance to reproach him for not having written to her. And it seemed to him privately that she *was* angelic when in answer to this she said ever so blandly:

“You know you read *King John* with me before you went

away. I thought over constantly what you said. I didn't understand it much at the time—I was so stupid. But it all came to me later."

"I wish you could see yourself," Sherringham answered.

"My dear fellow, I do. What do you take me for? I didn't miss a vibration of my voice, a fold of my robe."

"I didn't see you looking," Sherringham returned.

"No one ever will. Do you think I would show it?"

"*Ars celare artem*," Basil Dashwood jocosely dropped.

"You must first have the art to hide," said Sherringham, wondering a little why Miriam didn't introduce her young friend to him. She was, however, both then and later, perfectly neglectful of such cares, never thinking or heeding how other people got on together. When she found they didn't get on she laughed at them: that was the nearest she came to arranging for them. Sherringham observed, from the moment she felt her strength, the immense increase of her good-humoured inattention to detail—all detail save that of her work, to which she was ready to sacrifice holocausts of feelings, when the feelings were other people's. This conferred on her a kind of profanity, an absence of ceremony in her social relations, which was both amusing, because it suggested that she would take what she gave, and formidable, because it was inconvenient and you might not care to give what she would take.

"If you haven't got any art it's not quite the same as if you didn't hide it, is it?" asked Basil Dashwood.

"That's right—say one of your clever things!" murmured Miriam, sweetly, to the young man.

"You're always acting," he answered, in English, with a laugh, while Sherringham remained struck with his expressing just what he himself had felt weeks before.

"And when you have shown them your fish-wife, to your public *de là-bas*, what will you do next?" asked Madame Carré.

"I'll do Juliet—I'll do Cleopatra."

"Rather a big bill, isn't it?" Mr. Dashwood volunteered to Sherringham, in a friendly, discriminating manner.

"Constance and Juliet—take care you don't mix them," said Sherringham.

"I want to be various. You once told me I had a hundred characters," Miriam replied.

"Ah, *vous-en-êtes là*?" cried the old actress. "You may have a hundred characters, but you have only three plays. I'm told that's all there are in English."

Miriam appealed to Sherringham. "What arrangements have you made? What do the people want?"

"The people at the theatre?"

"I'm afraid they don't want King John, and I don't believe they hunger for Antony and Cleopatra," Basil Dashwood suggested. "Ships and sieges and armies and pyramids, you know: we mustn't be too heavy."

"Oh, I hate scenery!" sighed Miriam.

"*Elle est superbe*," said Madame Carré. "You must put those pieces on the stage: how will you do it?"

"Oh, we know how to get up a play in London, Madame Carré," Basil Dashwood responded, genially. "They put money on it, you know."

"On it? But what do they put *in* it? Who will interpret them? Who will manage a style like that—the style of which the verses she just repeated are a specimen? Whom have you got that one has ever heard of?"

"Oh, you'll hear of a good deal when once she gets started," Basil Dashwood contended, cheerfully.

Madame Carré looked at him a moment; then, "You'll become very bad," she said to Miriam. "I'm glad I sha'n't see it."

"People will do things for me—I'll make them," the girl declared. "I'll stir them up so that they'll have ideas."

"What people, pray?"

"Ah, terrible woman!" Sherringham moaned, theatrically.

"We translate your pieces—there will be plenty of parts," Basil Dashwood said.

"Why then go out of the door to come in at the window?—especially if you smash it! An English arrangement of a French piece is a pretty woman with her back turned."

"Do you really want to keep her?" Sherringham asked of Madame Carré, as if he were thinking for a moment that this after all might be possible.

She bent her strange eyes on him. "No, you are all too queer together; we couldn't be bothered with you, and you're not worth it."

"I'm glad it's together; we can console each other."

"If you only would; but you don't seem to! In short, I don't understand you—I give you up. But it doesn't matter," said the old woman, wearily, "for the theatre is dead and even you, *ma toute-belle*, won't bring it to life. Everything is going

from bad to worse, and I don't care what becomes of you. You wouldn't understand us here and they won't understand you there, and everything is impossible, and no one is a whit the wiser, and it's not of the least consequence. Only when you raise your arms lift them just a little higher," Madame Carré added.

"My mother will be happier *chez nous*," said Miriam, throwing her arms straight up with a noble tragic movement.

"You won't be in the least in the right path till your mother's in despair."

"Well, perhaps we can bring that about even in London," Sherringham suggested, laughing.

"Dear Mrs. Rooth—she's great fun," Mr. Dashwood dropped.

Miriam transferred the gloomy beauty of her gaze to him, as if she were practising. "*You* won't upset her, at any rate." Then she stood with her fatal mask before Madame Carré. "I want to do the modern too. I want to do *le drame*, with realistic effects."

"And do you want to look like the portico of the Madeleine when it's draped for a funeral?" her instructress mocked. "Never, never. I don't believe you're various: that's not the way I see you. You're pure tragedy, with *de grands effets de voix*, in the great style, or you're nothing."

"Be beautiful—be only that," Sherringham advised. "Be only what you can be so well—something that one may turn to for glimpse of perfection, to lift one out of all the vulgarities of the day."

Thus apostrophized, the girl broke out with one of the speeches of Racine's Phædra, hushing her companions on the instant. "You'll be the English Rachel," said Basil Dashwood when she stopped.

"Acting in French!" Madame Carré exclaimed. "I don't believe in an English Rachel."

"I shall have to work it out, what I shall be," Miriam responded with a rich, pensive effect.

"You're in wonderfully good form to-day," Sherringham said to her; his appreciation revealing a personal subjection which he was unable to conceal from his companions, much as he wished it.

"I really mean to do everything."

"Very well; after all, Garrick did."

"Well, I shall be the Garrick of my sex."

"There's a very clever author doing something for me; I should like you to see it," said Basil Dashwood, addressing himself equally to Miriam and to her diplomatic friend.

"Ah, if you have very clever authors!" Madame Carré spun the sound to the finest satiric thread.

"I shall be very happy to see it," said Sherringham.

This response was so benevolent that Basil Dashwood presently began: "May I ask you at what theatre you have made arrangements?"

Sherringham looked at him a moment. "Come and see me at the Embassy and I'll tell you." Then he added: "I know your sister, Mrs. Lovick."

"So I supposed: that's why I took the liberty of asking such a question."

"It's no liberty ; but Mr. Sherringham doesn't appear to be able to tell you," said Miriam.

"Well, you know it's a very curious world, all those theatrical people over there," Sherringham said.

"Ah, don't say anything against them, when I'm one of them," Basil Dashwood laughed.

"I might plead the absence of information, as Miss Rooth has neglected to make us acquainted."

Miriam smiled : "I know you both so little." But she presented them, with a great stately air, to each other, and the two men shook hands while Madame Carré observed them.

"*Tiens !* you gentlemen meet here for the first time ? You do right to become friends—that's the best thing. Live together in peace and mutual confidence. *C'est de beaucoup le plus sage.*"

"Certainly, for yoke-fellows," said Sherringham.

He began the next moment to repeat to his new acquaintance some of the things he had been told in London ; but their hostess stopped him off, waving the talk away with charming overdone stage-horror and the young hands of the heroines of Marivaux. "Ah, wait till you go, for that ! Do you suppose I care for news of your mountebanks' booths ?"

VI.

As many people know, there are not, in the famous Théâtre Français, more than a dozen good seats accessible to ladies. The stalls are forbidden them, the boxes are a quarter of a mile from the stage and the balcony is a delusion save for a few chairs at either end of its vast horseshoe. But there are two excellent *baignoires d'avant-scène*, which indeed are by no means always to be had. It was however into one of them that, immediately after his return to Paris, Sherringham ushered Mrs. Rooth and her daughter, with the further escort of Basil Dashwood. He had chosen the evening of the reappearance of the celebrated Mademoiselle Voisin (she had been enjoying a *congé* of three months), an actress whom Miriam had seen several times before and for whose method she professed a high though somewhat critical esteem. It was only for the return of this charming performer that Sherringham had been waiting to respond to Miriam's most ardent wish—that of spending an hour in the *foyer des artistes* of the great theatre. She was the person whom he knew best in the house of Molière; he could count upon her to do them the honours some night when she was in the “bill,” and make the occasion sociable. Miriam had been impatient for it—she was so

convinced that her eyes would be opened in the holy of holies ; but wishing particularly, as he did, to participate in her impression he had made her promise that she would not taste of this experience without him—not let Madame Carré, for instance, take her in his absence. There were questions the girl wished to put to Mademoiselle Voisin—questions which, having admired her from the balcony, she felt she was exactly the person to answer. She was more “in it” now, after all, than Madame Carré, in spite of her slenderer talent : she was younger, fresher, more modern and (Miriam found the word) less academic. Sherringham perfectly foresaw the day when his young friend would make indulgent allowances for poor Madame Carré, patronizing her as an old woman of good intentions.

The play, to-night, was six months old, a large, serious, successful comedy, by the most distinguished of authors, with a thesis, a chorus, embodied in one character, a *scène à faire* and a part full of opportunities for Mademoiselle Voisin. There were things to be said about this artist, strictures to be dropped as to the general quality of her art, and Miriam leaned back now, making her comments as if they cost her less ; but the actress had knowledge and distinction and pathos, and our young lady repeated several times : “How quiet she is, how wonderfully quiet ! Scarcely anything moves but her face and her voice. *Le geste rare*, but really expressive when it comes. I like that economy ; it’s the only way to make the gesture significant.”

“I don’t admire the way she holds her arms,” Basil Dashwood said : “like a *demoiselle de magasin* trying on a jacket.”

"Well, she holds them, at any rate. I dare say it's more than you do with yours."

"Oh, yes, she holds them; there's no mistake about that. 'I hold them, I hope, *hein?*' she seems to say to all the house." The young English professional laughed good-humouredly, and Sherringham was struck with the pleasant familiarity he had established with their brave companion. He was knowing and ready, and he said, in the first entr'acte (they were waiting for the second to go behind), amusing, perceptive things. "They teach them to be ladylike, and Voisin is always trying to show that. 'See how I walk, see how I sit, see how quiet I am and how I have le geste rare. Now can you say I ain't a lady?' She does it all as if she had a class."

"Well, to-night I'm her class," said Miriam.

"Oh, I don't mean of actresses, but of *femmes du monde*. She shows them how to act in society."

"You had better take a few lessons," Miriam retorted.

"You should see Voisin in society," Sherringham interposed.

"Does she go into it?" Mrs. Rooth demanded, with interest.

Sherringham hesitated. "She receives a great many people."

"Why shouldn't they, when they're nice?" Mrs. Rooth continued.

"When the people are nice?" Miriam asked.

"Now don't tell me *she's* not what one would wish," said Mrs. Rooth to Sherringham.

"It depends upon what that is," he answered, smiling.

"What I should wish if she were my daughter," the old woman rejoined, blandly.

"Ah, wish your daughter to act as well as that, and you'll do the handsome thing for her!"

"Well, she *seems* to feel what she says," Mrs. Rooth murmured, piously.

"She has some stiff things to say. I mean about her past," Basil Dashwood remarked. "The past—the dreadful past—on the stage!"

"Wait till the end, to see how she comes out. We must all be merciful!" sighed Mrs. Rooth.

"We've seen it before; you know what happens," Miriam observed to her mother.

"I've seen so many, I get them mixed."

"Yes, they're all in queer predicaments. Poor old mother—what we show you!" laughed the girl.

"Ah, it will be what *you* show me: something noble and wise!"

"I want to do this; it's a magnificent part," said Miriam.

"You couldn't put it on in London; they wouldn't swallow it," Basil Dashwood declared.

"Aren't there things they do there, to get over the difficulties?"

"You can't get over what *she* did," the young man replied.

"Yes, we must pay, we must expiate!" Mrs. Rooth moaned, as the curtain rose again.

When the second act was over our friends passed out of their baignoire into those corridors of tribulation where the bristling *ouvreuse*, like a pawnbroker driving a roaring trade mounts guard upon piles of heterogeneous clothing, and, gairing the top of the fine staircase which forms the state entrance

and connects the statued vestibule of the basement with the grand tier of boxes, opened an ambiguous door, composed of little mirrors, and found themselves in the society of the initiated. The janitors were courteous folk who greeted Sherringham as an acquaintance, and he had no difficulty in marshalling his little troop toward the foyer. They traversed a low, curving lobby, hung with pictures and furnished with velvet-covered benches, where several unrecognized persons, of both sexes, looked at them without hostility, and arrived at an opening on the right from which by a short flight of steps there was a descent to one of the wings of the stage. Here Miriam paused in silent excitement, like a young warrior arrested by a glimpse of the battle-field. Her vision was carried off through a lane of light to the point of vantage from which the actor held the house; but there was a hushed guard over the place, and curiosity could only glance and pass.

Then she came with her companions to a sort of parlour with a polished floor, not large and rather vacant, where her attention flew delightedly to a coat-tree, in a corner, from which three or four dresses were suspended—dresses that she immediately perceived to be costumes in that night's play—accompanied by a saucer of something and a much-worn powder-puff casually left upon a sofa. This was a familiar note in a general impression (it had begun at the threshold) of high decorum—a sense of majesty in the place. Miriam rushed at the powder-puff (there was no one in the room), snatched it up and gazed at it with droll veneration; then stood rapt a moment before the charming petticoats (“That’s

Dunoyer's first under-skirt," she said to her mother), while Sherringham explained that in this apartment an actress traditionally changed her gown, when the transaction was simple enough, to save the long ascent to her *loge*. He felt like a cicerone showing a church to a party of provincials; and indeed there was a grave hospitality in the air, mingled with something academic and important, the tone of an institution, a temple, which made them all, out of respect and delicacy, hold their breath a little and tread the shining floors with discretion.

These precautions increased (Mrs. Rooth crept in like a friendly but undomesticated cat), after they entered the foyer itself, a square spacious saloon, covered with pictures and relics and draped in official green velvet, where the *genius loci* holds a reception every night in the year. The effect was freshly charming to Sherringham; he was fond of the place, always saw it again with pleasure, enjoyed its honourable look and the way, among the portraits and scrolls, the records of a splendid history, the green velvet and the waxed floors, the *genius loci* seemed to be "at home" in the quiet lamp-light. At the end of the room, in an ample chimney, blazed a fire of logs. Miriam said nothing; they looked about, noting that most of the portraits and pictures were "old-fashioned," and Basil Dashwood expressed disappointment at the absence of all the people they wanted most to see. Three or four gentlemen in evening dress circulated slowly, looking, like themselves, at the pictures, and another gentleman stood before a lady, with whom he was in conversation, seated against the wall. The foyer, in these conditions, resembled

a ball-room cleared for the dance, before the guests or the music had arrived.

"Oh, it's enough to see *this*; it makes my heart beat," said Miriam. "It's full of the vanished past, it makes me cry. I feel them here, the great artists I shall never see. Think of Rachel (look at her grand portrait there!) and how she stood on these very boards and trailed over them the robes of Hermione and Phèdre!" The girl broke out theatrically, as on the spot was right, not a bit afraid of her voice as soon as it rolled through the room; appealing to her companions as they stood under the chandelier and making the other persons present, who had already given her some attention, turn round to stare at so unusual a specimen of the English miss. She laughed musically when she noticed this, and her mother, scandalized, begged her to lower her tone. "It's all right. I produce an effect," said Miriam: "it sha'n't be said that I too haven't had my little success in the maison de Molière." And Sherringham repeated that it was all right—the place was familiar with mirth and passion, there was often wonderful talk there, and it was only the setting that was still and solemn. It happened that this evening—there was no knowing in advance—the scene was not characteristically brilliant; but to confirm his assertion, at the moment he spoke, Mademoiselle Dunoyer, who was also in the play, came into the room attended by a pair of gentlemen.

She was the celebrated, the perpetual, the necessary *ingénue*, who with all her talent could not have represented a woman of her actual age. She had the gliding, hopping movement of a small bird, the same air of having nothing to do with

time, and the clear, sure, piercing note, a miracle of exact vocalization. She chaffed her companions, she chaffed the room; she seemed to be a very clever little girl trying to personate a more innocent big one. She scattered her amiability about (showing Miriam how much the children of Molière took their ease), and it quickly placed her in the friendliest communication with Peter Sherringham, who already enjoyed her acquaintance and who now extended it to his companions and in particular to the young lady *sur le point d'entrer au théâtre*.

"You deserve a happier lot," said the actress, looking up at Miriam brightly, as if to a great height, and taking her in; upon which Sherringham left them together a little and led Mrs. Rooth and young Dashwood to consider further some of the pictures.

"Most delightful, most curious," the old woman murmured, about everything; while Basil Dashwood exclaimed, in the presence of most of the portraits: "But their ugliness—their ugliness: did you ever see such a collection of hideous people? And those who were supposed to be good-looking—the beauties of the past—they are worse than the others. Ah, you may say what you will, *nous sommes mieux que ça!*" Sherringham suspected him of irritation, of not liking the theatre of the great rival nation to be thrust down his throat. They returned to Miriam and Mademoiselle Dunoyer, and Sherringham asked the actress a question about one of the portraits, to which there was no name attached. She replied, like a child who had only played about the room, that she was *toute honteuse* not to be able to tell him the original: she had

forgotten, she had never asked—" *Vous allez me trouver bien légère !* " She appealed to the other persons present, who formed a gallery for her, and laughed in delightful ripples at their suggestions, which she covered with ridicule. She bestirred herself ; she declared she would ascertain, she should not be happy till she did, and swam out of the room, with the prettiest paddles, to obtain the information, leaving behind her a perfume of delicate kindness and gaiety. She seemed above all things obliging, and Sherringham said that she was almost as natural off the stage as on. She didn't come back.

VII.

WHETHER Sherringham had prearranged it is more than I can say, but Mademoiselle Voisin delayed so long to show herself that Mrs. Rooth, who wished to see the rest of the play, though she had sat it out on another occasion, expressed a returning relish for her corner of the baignoire and gave her conductor the best pretext he could have desired for asking Basil Dashwood to be so good as to escort her back. When the young actor, of whose personal preference Sherringham was quite aware, had led Mrs. Rooth away with an absence of moroseness which showed that his striking analogy with a gentleman was not kept for the footlights, the two others sat on a divan in the part of the room furthest from the entrance, so that it gave them a degree of privacy, and Miriam watched the coming and going of their fellow-visitors and the indefinite people, attached to the theatre, hanging about, while her companion gave a name to some of the figures, Parisian celebrities.

"Fancy poor Dashwood, cooped up there with mamma!" the girl exclaimed, whimsically.

"You're awfully cruel to him; but that's of course," said Sherringham.

"It seems to me I'm as kind as you: you sent him off."

"That was for your mother: she was tired."

"Oh, gammon! And why, if I *were* cruel, should it be of course?"

"Because you must destroy and torment and consume—that's your nature. But you can't help your type, can you?"

"My type?" the girl repeated.

"It's bad, perverse, dangerous. It's essentially insolent."

"And pray what is yours, when you talk like that? Would you say such things if you didn't know the depths of my good-nature?"

"Your good-nature all comes back to that," said Sherringham. "It's an abyss of ruin—for others. You have no respect. I'm speaking of the artistic character, in the direction and in the plenitude in which you have it. It's unscrupulous, nervous, capricious, wanton."

"I don't know about respect: one can be good," Miriam reasoned.

"It doesn't matter, so long as one is powerful," answered Sherringham. "We can't have everything, and surely we ought to understand that we must pay for things. A splendid organization for a special end, like yours, is so rare and rich and fine that we oughtn't to grudge it its conditions."

"What do you call its conditions?" Miriam demanded, turning and looking at him.

"Oh, the need to take its ease, to take up space, to make itself at home in the world, to square its elbows and knock others about. That's large and free; it's the good-nature you speak of. You must forage and ravage and leave a track

behind you; you must live upon the country you occupy. And you give such delight that, after all, you are welcome—you are infinitely welcome!”

“I don’t know what you mean. I only care for the idea,” Miriam said.

“That’s exactly what I pretend; and we must all help you to it. You use us, you push us about, you break us up. We are your tables and chairs, the simple furniture of your life.”

“Whom do you mean by ‘we’?”

Sherringham gave a laugh. “Oh, don’t be afraid—there will be plenty of others.”

Miriam made no rejoinder to this, but after a moment she broke out again: “Poor Dashwood, immured with mamma—he’s like a lame chair that one has put into the corner.”

“Don’t break him up before he has served. I really believe that something will come out of him,” her companion went on. “However, you’ll break me up first,” he added, “and him probably never at all.”

“And why shall I honour you so much more?”

“Because I’m a better article, and you’ll feel that.”

“You have the superiority of modesty—I see.”

“I’m better than a young mountebank—I’ve vanity enough to say that.”

She turned upon him with a flush in her cheek and a splendid dramatic face. “How you hate us! Yes, at bottom, below your little taste, you *hate* us!” she repeated.

He coloured too, met her eyes, looked into them a minute, seemed to accept the imputation, and then said quickly: “Give it up; come away with me.”

"Come away with you?"

"Leave this place: give it up."

"You brought me here, you insisted it should be only you, and now you must stay," she declared, with a head-shake and a laugh. "You should know what you want, dear Mr. Sherringham."

"I do—I know now. Come away, before she comes."

"Before she comes?"

"She's success—this wonderful Voisin—she's triumph, she's full accomplishment: the hard, brilliant realization of what I want to avert for you." Miriam looked at him in silence, the angry light still in her face, and he repeated: "Give it up—give it up."

Her eyes softened after a moment; she smiled and then she said: "Yes, you're better than poor Dashwood."

"Give it up and we'll live for ourselves, *in* ourselves, in something that can have a sanctity."

"All the same, you do hate us," the girl went on.

"I don't want to be conceited, but I mean that I'm sufficiently fine and complicated to tempt you. I'm an expensive modern watch, with a wonderful escapement—therefore you'll smash me if you can."

"Never—never!" said the girl, getting up. "You tell me the hour too well." She quitted her companion and stood looking at Gérôme's fine portrait of the pale Rachel, invested with the antique attributes of tragedy. The rise of the curtain had drawn away most of the company. Sherringham, from his bench, watched Miriam a little, turning his eye from her to the vivid image of the dead actress and thinking that his

companion suffered little by the juxtaposition. Presently he came over and joined her again, and she said to him : "I wonder if that is what your cousin had in his mind."

"My cousin?"

"What was his name? Mr. Dormer; that first day at Madame Carré's. He offered to paint my portrait."

"I remember. I put him up to it."

"Was he thinking of this?"

"I don't think he has ever seen it. I dare say I was."

"Well, when we go to London he must do it," said Miriam.

"Oh, there's no hurry," Sherringham replied.

"Don't you want my picture?" asked the girl, with one of her successful touches.

"I'm not sure I want it from you. I don't know quite what he'd make of you."

"He looked so clever—I liked him. I saw him again at your party."

"He's a dear fellow; but what is one to say of a painter who goes for his inspiration to the House of Commons?"

"To the House of Commons?"

"He has lately got himself elected."

"Dear me, what a pity! I wanted to sit for him; but perhaps he won't have me, as I'm not a member of Parliament."

"It's my sister, rather, who has got him in."

"Your sister who was at your house that day? What has she to do with it?"

"Why, she's his cousin, just as I am. And in addition," Sherringham went on, "she's to be married to him."

"Married—really? So he paints *her*, I suppose?"

"Not much, probably. His talent in that line isn't what she esteems in him most."

"It isn't great, then?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"And in the political line?"

"I scarcely can tell. He's very clever."

"He does paint then?"

"I dare say."

Miriam looked at Gérôme's picture again. "Fancy his going into the House of Commons! And your sister put him there?"

"She worked, she canvassed."

"Ah, you're a queer family!" the girl exclaimed, turning round at the sound of a step.

"We're lost—here's Mademoiselle Voisin," said Sherringham.

This celebrity presented herself smiling and addressing Miriam. "I acted for *you* to-night—I did my best."

"What a pleasure to speak to you, to thank you!" the girl murmured, admiringly. She was startled and dazzled.

"I couldn't come to you before, but now I've got a rest—for half an hour," the actress went on. Gracious and passive, as if she were a little tired, she let Sherringham, without looking at him, take her hand and raise it to his lips. "I'm sorry I make you lose the others—they are so good in this act," she added.

"We have seen them before, and there's nothing so good as you," Miriam replied.

"I like my part," said Mademoiselle Voisin, gently, smiling still at our young lady with clear, charming eyes. "One is always better in that case."

"She's so bad sometimes, you know!" Sherringham jested, to Miriam; leading the actress to glance at him kindly and vaguely, with a little silence which, with her, you could not call embarrassment, but which was still less affectation.

"And it's so interesting to be here—so interesting!" Miriam declared.

"Ah, you like our old house? Yes, we are very proud of it." And Mademoiselle Voisin smiled again at Sherringham, good-humouredly, as if to say: "Well, here I am, and what do you want of me? Don't ask me to invent it myself, but if you'll tell me I'll do it." Miriam admired the note of discreet interrogation in her voice—the slight suggestion of surprise at their "old house" being liked. The actress was already an astonishment to her, from her seeming still more perfect on a nearer view; which was not, she had an idea, what actresses usually did. This was very encouraging to her: it widened the programme of a young lady about to embrace the scenic career. To have so much to show before the footlights and yet to have so much left when you came off—that was really wonderful. Mademoiselle Voisin's eyes, as one looked into them, were still more agreeable than the distant spectator would have supposed; and there was in her appearance an extreme finish which instantly suggested to Miriam that she herself, in comparison, was big and rough and coarse.

"You're lovely to-night—you're particularly lovely," said

Sherringham, very frankly, translating Miriam's own impression and at the same time giving her an illustration of the way that, in Paris at least, gentlemen expressed themselves to the stars of the drama. She thought she knew her companion very well and had been witness of the degree to which, under these circumstances, his familiarity could increase; but his address to the slim, distinguished, harmonious woman before them had a different quality, the note of a special usage. If Miriam had had any apprehension that such directness might be taken as excessive, it was removed by the manner in which Mademoiselle Voisin returned—

“Oh, one is always well enough when one is made up; one is always exactly the same.” That served as an example of the good taste with which a star of the drama could receive homage that was wanting in originality. Miriam determined on the spot that this should be the way *she* would receive it. The grace of her new acquaintance was the greater as the becoming bloom which she alluded to as artificial was the result of a science so consummate that it had none of the grossness of a mask. The perception of all this was exciting to our young aspirant, and her excitement relieved itself in the inquiry, which struck her as rude as soon as she had uttered it—

“You acted for *me*? How did you know? What am I to you?”

“Monsieur Sherringham has told me about you. He says we are nothing beside you; that you are to be the great star of the future. I'm proud that you've seen me.”

“That of course is what I tell every one,” Sherringham said, a trifle awkwardly, to Miriam.

"I can believe it when I see you. *Je vous ai bien observée,*" the actress continued, in her sweet, conciliatory tone.

Miriam looked from one of her interlocutors to the other, as if there was a joy to her in this report of Sherringham's remarks, accompanied however, and partly mitigated, by a quicker vision of what might have passed between a secretary of embassy and a creature so exquisite as Mademoiselle Voisin. "Ah, you're wonderful people—a most interesting impression!" she sighed.

"I was looking for you; he had prepared me. We are such old friends!" said the actress, in a tone courteously exempt from intention: upon which Sherringham again took her hand and raised it to his lips, with a tenderness which her whole appearance seemed to bespeak for her, a sort of practical consideration and carefulness of touch, as if she were an object precious and frail, an instrument for producing rare sounds, to be handled, like a legendary violin, with a recognition of its value.

"Your dressing-room is so pretty—show her your dressing-room," said Sherringham.

"Willingly, if she'll come up. *Vous savez, c'est une montée.*"

"It's a shame to inflict it on you," Miriam objected.

"*Comment donc?* If it will interest you in the least!" They exchanged civilities, almost caresses, trying which could have the nicest manner to the other. It was the actress's manner that struck Miriam most; it denoted such a training, so much taste, expressed such a ripe conception of urbanity.

"No wonder she acts well when she has that tact—feels, perceives, is so remarkable, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" Miriam

said to herself as they followed their conductress into another corridor and up a wide, plain staircase. The staircase was spacious and long, and this part of the establishment was sombre and still, with the gravity of a college or a convent. They reached another passage, lined with little doors, on each of which the name of a comedian was painted; and here the aspect became still more monastic, like that of a row of solitary cells. Mademoiselle Voisin led the way to her own door, obligingly, as if she wished to be hospitable, dropping little subdued, friendly attempts at explanation on the way. At her threshold the monasticism stopped. Miriam found herself in a wonderfully upholstered nook, a nest of lamplight and delicate cretonne. Save for its pair of long glasses it looked like a tiny boudoir, with a water-colour drawing of value in each panel of stretched stuff, its crackling fire, its charming order. It was intensely bright and extremely hot, singularly pretty and exempt from litter. Nothing was lying about, but a small draped doorway led into an inner sanctuary. To Miriam it seemed royal; it immediately made the art of the comedian the most distinguished thing in the world. It was just such a place as they *should* have, in the intervals, if they were expected to be great artists. It was a result of the same evolution as Mademoiselle Voisin herself—not that our young lady found this particular term to her hand, to express her idea. But her mind was flooded with an impression of style, of refinement, of the long continuity of a tradition. The actress said, “*Voilà, c’est tout!*” as if it were little enough and there were even something clumsy in her having brought them so far for nothing and in their all sitting there

waiting and looking at each other till it was time for her to change her dress. But to Miriam it was occupation enough to note what she did and said: these things and her whole person and carriage struck her as exquisite in their adaptation to the particular occasion. She had had an idea that foreign actresses were rather of the *cabotin* order; but her hostess suggested to her much more a princess than a cabotine. She would do things as she liked, and straight off: Miriam couldn't fancy her in the gropings and humiliations of rehearsal. Everything in her had been sifted and formed, her tone was perfect, her amiability complete, and she might have been the charming young wife of a secretary of state receiving a pair of strangers of distinction. Miriam observed all her movements. And then, as Sherringham had said, she was particularly lovely.

Suddenly she told Sherringham that she must put him *à la porte*—she wanted to change her dress. He retired and returned to the foyer, where Miriam was to rejoin him after remaining the few minutes more with Mademoiselle Voisin and coming down with her. He waited for his companion, walking up and down and making up his mind; and when she presently came in he said to her:

“Please don't go back for the rest of the play. Stay here.” They now had the foyer virtually to themselves.

“I want to stay here. I like it better.” She moved back to the chimney-piece, from above which the cold portrait of Rachel looked down, and as he accompanied her he said:

“I meant what I said just now.”

“What you said to Voisin?”

"No, no ; to you. Give it up and live with *me*."

"Give it up?" And she turned her stage face upon him.

"Give it up and I'll marry you to-morrow."

"This a happy time to ask it!" she mocked. "And this is a good place."

"Very good indeed, and that's why I speak: it's a place to make one choose—it puts it all before one."

"To make *you* choose, you mean. I'm much obliged, but that's not my choice," laughed Miriam.

"You shall be anything you like—except this."

"Except what I most want to be? I *am* much obliged."

"Don't you care for me? Haven't you any gratitude?" Sherringham asked.

"Gratitude for kindly removing the blessed cup from my lips? I want to be what *she* is—I want it more than ever."

"Ah, what she is!" he replied impatiently.

"Do you mean I can't? We'll see if I can't. Tell me more about her—tell me everything."

"Haven't you seen for yourself, and can't you judge?"

"She's strange, she's mysterious," Miriam declared, looking at the fire. "She showed us nothing—nothing of her real self."

"So much the better, all things considered."

"Are there all sorts of other things in her life? That's what I believe," Miriam went on, raising her eyes to him.

"I can't tell you what there is in the life of such a woman."

"Imagine—when she's so perfect!" the girl exclaimed, thoughtfully. "Ah, she kept me off—she kept me off! Her charming manner is in itself a kind of contempt. It's an

abyss—it's the wall of China. She has a hard polish, an inimitable surface, like some wonderful porcelain that costs more than you'd think."

"Do you want to become like that?" Sherringham asked.

"If I could I should be enchanted. One can always try."

"You must act better than she," said Sherringham.

"Better? I thought you wanted me to give it up."

"Ah, I don't know what I want, and you torment me and turn me inside out! What I want is you yourself."

"Oh, don't worry," said Miriam, kindly. Then she added that Mademoiselle Voisin had asked her to come to see her; to which Sherringham replied, with a certain dryness, that she would probably not find that necessary. This made Miriam stare, and she asked, "Do you mean it won't do, on account of mamma's prejudices?"

"Say, this time, on account of mine."

"Do you mean because she has lovers?"

"Her lovers are none of our business."

"None of mine, I see. So you have been one of them?"

"No such luck."

"What a pity! I should have liked to see that. One must see everything, to be able to do everything." And as he inquired what she had wished to see she replied: "The way a woman like that receives one of the old ones."

Sherringham gave a groan at this, which was at the same time partly a laugh, and, turning away and dropping upon a bench, ejaculated: "You'll do—you'll do!"

He sat there some minutes with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands. Miriam remained looking at the

portrait of Rachel ; after which she demanded : “Doesn’t such a woman as that receive—receive every one ?”

“Every one who goes to see her, no doubt.”

“And who goes ?”

“Lots of men—clever men, eminent men.”

“Ah, what a charming life ! Then doesn’t she go out ?”

“Not what we Philistines mean by that—not into society, never. She never enters a lady’s drawing-room.”

“How strange, when one’s as distinguished as that ; except that she must escape a lot of stupidities and *corvées*. Then where does she learn such manners ?”

“She teaches manners, *à ses heures* : she doesn’t need to learn them.”

“Oh, she has given me ideas ! But in London actresses go into society,” Miriam continued.

“Oh, in London *nous mêlons les genres !*”

“And sha’n’t *I* go—I mean if *I* want ?”

“You’ll have every facility to bore yourself. Don’t doubt of it.”

“And doesn’t she feel excluded ?” Miriam asked.

“Excluded from what ? She has the fullest life.”

“The fullest ?”

“An intense artistic life. The cleverest men in Paris talk over her work with her ; the principal authors of plays discuss with her subjects and characters and questions of treatment. She lives in the world of art.”

“Ah, the world of art—how I envy her ! And you offer me Dashwood !”

Sherringham rose in his emotion. “I offer you—?”

Miriam burst out laughing. "You look so droll! You offer me yourself then, instead of all these things."

"My child, I also am a very clever man," he said, smiling, though conscious that for a moment he had stood gaping.

"You are—you are; I delight in you. No ladies at all—*no femmes comme il faut?*" Miriam began again.

"Ah, what do *they* matter? Your business is the artistic life!" he broke out with inconsequence and with a little irritation at hearing her sound that trivial note again.

"You're a dear—your charming good sense comes back to you! What do you want of me then?"

"I want you for myself—not for others; and now, in time, before anything's done."

"Why then did you bring me here? Everything's done; I feel it to-night."

"I know the way you should look at it—if you do look at it at all," Sherringham conceded.

"That's so easy! I thought you liked the stage so," Miriam said, artfully.

"Don't you want me to be a great swell?"

"And don't you want *me* to be?"

"You will be—you'll share my glory."

"So will you share mine."

"The husband of an actress? Yes, I see that!" Sherringham cried, with a frank ring of disgust.

"It's a silly position, no doubt. But if you're too good for it why talk about it? Don't you think I'm important?" Miriam inquired. Her companion stood looking at her, and she suddenly said in a different tone: "Ah, why should we

quarrel, when you have been so kind, so generous? Can't we always be friends—the solidest friends?"

Her voice sank to the sweetest cadence and her eyes were grateful and good as they rested on him. She sometimes said things with such perfection that they seemed dishonest, but in this case Sherringham was stirred to an expressive response. Just as he was making it, however, he was moved to utter other words—"Take care, here's Dashwood!" Mrs. Rooth's companion was in the doorway. He had come back to say that they really must relieve him.

VIII.

MRS. DALLOW came up to London soon after the meeting of Parliament; she made no secret of the fact that she was fond of the place, and naturally in present conditions it would not have become less attractive to her. But she prepared to withdraw from it again for the Easter vacation, not to return to Harsh, but to pay a couple of country visits. She did not however leave town with the crowd—she never did anything with the crowd—but waited till the Monday after Parliament rose; facing with composure, in Great Stanhope Street, the horrors, as she had been taught to consider them, of a Sunday out of the session. She had done what she could to mitigate them by asking a handful of “stray men” to dine with her that evening. Several members of this disconsolate class sought comfort in Great Stanhope Street in the afternoon, and them for the most part she also invited to come back at eight o’clock. There were therefore almost too many people at dinner—there were even a couple of wives. Nick Dormer came to dinner, but he was not present in the afternoon. Each of the persons who were had said on coming in: “So you’ve not gone—I’m awfully glad.” Mrs. Dallow had replied, “No, I’ve not gone,” but she had in no case added that she was glad, nor had she offered an explanation. She

never offered explanations : she always assumed that no one could invent them so well as those who had the florid taste to desire them.

And in this case she was right, for it is probable that few of her visitors failed to say to themselves that her not having gone would have had something to do with Dormer. That could pass for an explanation with many of Mrs. Dallow's visitors, who as a general thing were not morbidly analytic ; especially with those who met Nick as a matter of course at the dinner. His being present at this lady's entertainments, being in her house whenever, as the phrase was, a candle was lighted, was taken as a sign that there was something rather particular between them. Nick had said to her more than once that people would wonder why they didn't marry ; but he was wrong in this, inasmuch as there were many of their friends to whom it would not have occurred that his position could be improved by it. That they were cousins was a fact not so evident to others as to themselves, in consequence of which they appeared remarkably intimate. The person seeing clearest in the matter was Mrs. Gresham, who lived so much in the world that being alone had become her idea of true sociability. She knew very well that if she had been privately engaged to a young man as amiable as Nick Dormer she would have managed that publicity should not play such a part in their intercourse ; and she had her secret scorn for the stupidity of people whose conception of Nick's relation to Julia Dallow rested on the fact that he was always included in her parties. "If he never was there they might talk," she said to herself. But Mrs. Gresham was supersubtle. To her it would have

appeared natural that Julia should celebrate the parliamentary recess by going down to Harsh and securing Nick's company there for a fortnight; she recognized Mrs. Dallow's actual plan as a comparatively poor substitute—the project of spending the holidays in other people's houses, to which Nick had also promised to come. Mrs. Gresham was romantic; she wondered what was the good of mere snippets and snatches, the chances that any one might have, when large, still days *à deux* were open to you—chances of which half the sanctity was in what they excluded. However, there were more unsettled matters between Mrs. Dallow and her queer kinsman than even Mrs. Gresham's fine insight could embrace. She was not present on the Sunday before Easter at the dinner in Great Stanhope Street; but if she had been Julia's singular indifference to observation would have stopped short of encouraging her to remain in the drawing-room with Nick after the others had gone. I may add that Mrs. Gresham's extreme curiosity would have emboldened her as little to do so. She would have taken for granted that the pair wished to be alone together, though she would have regarded this only as a snippet.

The guests stayed late and it was nearly twelve o'clock when Nick, standing before the fire in the room they had quitted, broke out to his companion:

“See here, Julia, how long do you really expect me to endure this kind of thing?” Mrs. Dallow made him no answer; she only leaned back in her chair with her eyes upon his. He met her gaze for a moment; then he turned round to the fire and for another moment looked into it. After this

he faced Mrs. Dallow again with the exclamation: "It's so foolish—it's so damnably foolish!"

She still said nothing, but at the end of a minute she spoke without answering him. "I shall expect you on Tuesday, and I hope you'll come by a decent train."

"What do you mean by a decent train?"

"I mean I hope you'll not leave it till the last thing before dinner, so that we can have a little walk or something."

"What's a little walk or something? Why, if you make such a point of my coming to Griffin, do you want me to come at all?"

Mrs. Dallow hesitated an instant; then she exclaimed: "I knew you hated it!"

"You provoke me so," said Nick. "You try to, I think."

"And Several's still worse. You'll get out of that if you can," Mrs. Dallow went on.

"If I can? What's to prevent me?"

"You promised Lady Whiteroy. But of course that's nothing."

"I don't care a straw for Lady Whiteroy."

"And you promised me. But that's less still."

"It is foolish—it's quite idiotic," said Nick, with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the ceiling.

There was another silence, at the end of which Mrs. Dallow remarked: "You might have answered Mr. Macgeorge when he spoke to you."

"Mr. Macgeorge—what has he to do with it?"

"He has to do with your getting on a little. If you think that's the way!"

Nick broke into a laugh. "I like lessons in getting on—in other words I suppose you mean in urbanity—from you, Julia!"

"Why not from me?"

"Because you can do nothing base. You're incapable of putting on a flattering manner, to get something by it: therefore why should you expect me to? You're unflattering—that is you're austere—in proportion as there may be something to be got."

Mrs. Dallow sprang up from her chair, coming towards him. "There is only one thing I want in the world—you know very well."

"Yes, you want it so much that you won't even take it when it's pressed upon you. How long do you seriously expect me to bear it?" Nick repeated.

"I never asked you to do anything base," she said, standing in front of him. "If I'm not clever about throwing myself into things, it's all the more reason you should be."

"If you're not clever, my dear Julia?" Nick, standing close to her, placed his hands on her shoulders and shook her a little with a mixture of tenderness and passion. "You're clever enough to make me furious, sometimes!"

She opened and closed her fan, looking down at it while she submitted to this attenuated violence. "All I want is that when a man like Mr. Macgeorge talks to you, you shouldn't appear to be bored to death. You used to be so charming in that sort of way. And now you appear to take no interest in anything. At dinner to-night you scarcely opened your lips; you treated them all as if you only wished they'd go."

"I did wish they'd go. Haven't I told you a hundred times what I think of your salon?"

"How then do you want me to live?" Mrs. Dallow asked. "Am I not to have a creature in the house?"

"As many creatures as you like. Your freedom is complete, and as far as I am concerned always will be. Only when you challenge me and overhaul me—not justly I think—I must confess the simple truth, that there are many of your friends I don't delight in."

"Oh, *your* idea of pleasant people!" Julia exclaimed. "I should like once for all to know what it really is."

"I can tell you what it really isn't: it isn't Mr. Macgeorge. He's a being almost grotesquely limited."

"He'll be where you'll never be—unless you change."

"To be where Mr. Macgeorge is not would be very much my desire. Therefore why should I change?" Nick demanded. "However, I hadn't the least intention of being rude to him, and I don't think I was," he went on. "To the best of my ability I assume a virtue if I have it not; but apparently I'm not enough of a comedian."

"If you have it not? It's when you say things like that that you're so dreadfully tiresome. As if there were anything that you haven't or mightn't have!"

Nick turned away from his hostess; he took a few impatient steps in the room, looking at the carpet, with his hands in his pockets again. Then he came back to the fire with the observation: "It's rather hard to be found so wanting when one has tried to play one's part so beautifully." He paused, with his eyes on Mrs. Dallow's; then continued, with a vibration in

his voice : " I've imperilled my immortal soul, or at least I've bemuddled my intelligence, by all the things I don't care for that I've tried to do, and all the things I detest that I've tried to be, and all the things I never can be that I've tried to look as if I were—all the appearances and imitations, the pretences and hypocrisies in which I've steeped myself to the eyes ; and at the end of it (it serves me right!) my reward is simply to learn that I'm still not half humbug enough ! "

Mrs. Dallow looked away from him as soon as he had spoken these words ; she attached her eyes to the clock which stood behind him and observed irrelevantly :

" I'm very sorry, but I think you had better go. I don't like you to stay after midnight. "

" Ah, what you like and what you don't like, and where one begins and the other ends—all that's an impenetrable mystery ! " the young man declared. But he took no further notice of her allusion to his departure, adding in a different tone : " " A man like Mr. Macgeorge ! ' When you say a thing of that sort, in a certain particular way, I should rather like to suffer you to perish. "

Mrs. Dallow stared ; it might have seemed for an instant that she was trying to look stupid. " How can I help it if a few years hence he is certain to be at the head of any Liberal government ? "

" We can't help it, of course, but we can help talking about it, " Nick smiled. " If we don't mention it, it may not be noticed. "

" You're trying to make me angry. You're in one of your

vicious moods," observed Mrs. Dallow, blowing out, on the chimney-piece, a guttering candle.

"That I'm exasperated I have already had the honour very positively to inform you. All the same I maintain that I was irreproachable at dinner. I don't want you to think I shall always be so good as that."

"You looked so out of it; you were as gloomy as if every earthly hope had left you, and you didn't make a single contribution to any discussion that took place. Don't you think I observe you?" Mrs. Dallow asked, with an irony tempered by a tenderness that was unsuccessfully concealed.

"Ah, my darling, what you observe!" Nick exclaimed, laughing and stopping. But he added the next moment, more seriously, as if his tone had been disrespectful: "You probe me to the bottom, no doubt."

"You needn't come either to Griffin or to Severals if you don't want to."

"Give them up yourself; stay here with me!"

She coloured quickly, as he said this, and broke out: "Lord! how you hate political houses!"

"How can you say that, when from February to August I spend every blessed night in one?"

"Yes, and hate that worst of all."

"So do half the people who are in it. You must have so many things, so many people, so much *mise-en-scène* and such a perpetual spectacle to live," Nick went on. "Perpetual motion, perpetual visits, perpetual crowds! If you go into the country you'll see forty people every day and be mixed up with them all day. The idea of a quiet fortnight in town, when by

a happy if idiotic superstition everybody goes out of it, disconcerts and frightens you. It's the very time, it's the very place, to do a little work and possess one's soul."

This vehement allocution found Mrs. Dallow evidently somewhat unprepared; but she was sagacious enough, instead of attempting for the moment a general rejoinder, to seize on a single phrase and say: "Work? What work can you do in London at such a moment as this?"

Nick hesitated a little. "I might tell you that I wanted to get up a lot of subjects, to sit at home and read blue-books; but that wouldn't be quite what I mean."

"Do you mean you want to paint?"

"Yes, that's it, since you drag it out of me."

"Why do you make such a mystery about it? You're at perfect liberty," said Mrs. Dallow.

She extended her hand, to rest it on the mantel-shelf, but her companion took it on the way and held it in both his own. "You're delightful, Julia, when you speak in that tone—then I know why it is I love you; but I can't do anything if I go to Griffin, if I go to Severals."

"I see—I see," said Julia, reflectively and kindly.

"I've scarcely been inside of my studio for months and I feel quite homesick for it. The idea of putting in a few quiet days there" has taken hold of me: I rather cling to it."

"It seems so odd, your having a studio!" Julia dropped, speaking so quickly that the words were almost incomprehensible.

"Doesn't it sound absurd, for all the good it does me, or I

do in it? Of course one can produce nothing but rubbish on such terms—without continuity or persistence, with just a few days here and there. I ought to be ashamed of myself, no doubt; but even my rubbish interests me. ‘*Guenille si l’on veut, ma guenille m’est chère.*’ But I’ll go down to Harsh with you in a moment, Julia,” Nick pursued: “that would do as well, if we could be quiet there, without people, without a creature; and I should really be perfectly content. You’d sit for me; it would be the occasion we’ve so often wanted and never found.”

Mrs. Dallow shook her head slowly, with a smile that had a meaning for Nick. “Thank you, my dear; nothing would induce me to go to Harsh with you.”

The young man looked at her. “What’s the matter, whenever it’s a question of anything of that sort? Are you afraid of me?” She pulled her hand quickly out of his, turning away from him; but he went on: “Stay with me here then, when everything is so right for it. We shall do beautifully—have the whole place, have the whole day to ourselves. Hang your engagements! Telegraph you won’t come. We’ll live at the studio—you’ll sit to me every day. Now or never is our chance—when shall we have so good a one? Think how charming it will be! I’ll make you wish awfully that I shall do something.”

“I can’t get out of Griffin—it’s impossible,” returned Mrs. Dallow, moving further away, with her back presented to him.

“Then you *are* afraid of me—simply?”

She turned quickly round, very pale. “Of course I am; you are welcome to know it.”

He went toward her, and for a moment she seemed to make another slight movement of retreat. This however was scarcely perceptible, and there was nothing to alarm in the tone of reasonable entreaty in which Nick said to her as he went toward her: "Put an end, Julia, to our absurd situation—it really can't go on: you have no right to expect a man to be happy or comfortable in so false a position. We're talked of odiously—of that we may be sure; and yet what good have we of it?"

"Talked of? Do I care for that?"

"Do you mean you're indifferent because there are no grounds? That's just why I hate it."

"I don't know what you're talking about," exclaimed Mrs. Dallow, with quick disdain.

"Be my wife to-morrow—be my wife next week. Let us have done with this fantastic probation and be happy."

"Leave me now—come back to-morrow. I'll write to you." She had the air of pleading with him at present as he pleaded with her.

"You can't resign yourself to the idea of one's looking 'out of it'!" laughed Nick.

"Come to-morrow, before lunch," Mrs. Dallow continued.

"To be told I must wait six months more and then be sent about my business? Ah, Julia, Julia!" murmured the young man.

Something in this simple exclamation—it sounded natural and perfectly unstudied—evidently on the instant made a great impression on his companion. "You shall wait no longer," she said after a short silence.

"What do you mean by no longer?"

"Give me about five weeks—say till the Whitsuntide recess."

"Five weeks are a great deal," smiled Nick.

"There are things to be done—you ought to understand."

"I only understand how I love you."

"Dearest Nick!" said Mrs. Dallow; upon which he caught her in his arms.

"I have your promise then for five weeks hence, to a day?" he demanded, as she released herself.

"We'll settle that—the exact day: there are things to consider and to arrange. Come to luncheon to-morrow."

"I'll come early—I'll come at one," Nick said; and for a moment they stood smiling at each other.

"Do you think I *want* to wait, any more than you?" Mrs. Dallow asked.

"I don't feel so much out of it now!" he exclaimed, by way of answer. "You'll stay, of course, now—you'll give up your visits?"

She had hold of the lappet of his coat; she had kept it in her hand even while she detached herself from his embrace. There was a white flower in his buttonhole which she looked at and played with a moment before she said: "I have a better idea—you needn't come to Griffin. Stay in your studio—do as you like—paint dozens of pictures."

"Dozens? Barbarian!" Nick ejaculated.

The epithet apparently had an endearing suggestion to Mrs. Dallow; at any rate it led her to allow him to kiss her on her forehead—led her to say: "What on earth do I want but

that you should do absolutely as you please and be as happy as you can?"

Nick kissed her again, in another place, at this; but he inquired: "What dreadful proposition is coming now?"

"I'll go off and do up my visits and come back."

"And leave me alone?"

"Don't be affected!" said Mrs. Dallow. "You know you'll work much better without me. You'll live in your studio—I shall be well out of the way."

"That's not what one wants of a sitter. How can I paint you?"

"You can paint me all the rest of your life. I shall be a perpetual sitter."

"I believe I could paint you without looking at you," said Nick, smiling down at her. "You do excuse me, then, from those dreary places?"

"How can I insist, after what you said about the pleasure of keeping these days?" Mrs. Dallow asked sweetly.

"You're the best woman on earth; though it does seem odd you should rush away as soon as our little business is settled."

"We shall make it up. I know what I'm about. And now go!" Mrs. Dallow terminated, almost pushing her visitor out of the room.

IX.

It was certainly singular under the circumstances that on sitting down in his studio after Julia had left town Nick Dormer should not, as regards the effort to reproduce some beautiful form, have felt more chilled by the absence of a friend who was such an embodiment of beauty. She was away and he longed for her, and yet without her the place was more filled with what he wanted to find in it. He turned into it with confused feelings, the most definite of which was a sense of release and recreation. It looked blighted and lonely and dusty, and his old studies, as he rummaged them out, struck him as even clumsier than the last time he had ventured to drop his eyes on them. But amid this neglected litter, in the colourless and obstructed light of a high north window which needed washing, he tasted more sharply the possibility of positive happiness: it appeared to him that, as he had said to Julia, he was more in possession of his soul. It was frivolity and folly, it was puerility to spend valuable hours pottering over the vain implements of an art he had relinquished; and a certain shame that he had felt in presenting his plea to Julia Dallow that Sunday night arose from the sense not of what he clung to, but of what he had given up. He had turned his back upon serious work, so

that pottering was now all he could aspire to. It couldn't be fruitful, it couldn't be anything but ridiculous, almost ignoble ; but it soothed his nerves, it was in the nature of a secret dissipation. He had never suspected that he should ever have on his own part nerves to count with ; but this possibility had been revealed to him on the day it became clear that he was letting something precious go. He was glad he had not to justify himself to the critical, for this might have been a delicate business. The critical were mostly absent ; and besides, shut up all day in his studio, how should he ever meet them ? It was the place in the world where he felt furthest away from his constituents. That was a part of the pleasure—the consciousness that for the hour the coast was clear and his mind was free. His mother and his sister had gone to Broadwood : Lady Agnes (the phrase sounds brutal, but it represents his state of mind) was well out of the way. He had written to her as soon as Julia left town—he had apprised her of the fact that his wedding-day was fixed : a relief, for poor Lady Agnes, to a period of intolerable mystification, of taciturn wondering and watching. She had said her say the day of the poll at Harsh ; she was too proud to ask and too discreet to “ nag ” : so she could only wait for something that didn't arrive. The unconditioned loan of Broadwood had of course been something of a bribe to patience : she had at first felt that on the day she should take possession of that capital house Julia would indeed seem to have come into the family. But the gift had confirmed expectations just enough to make disappointment more bitter ; and the discomfort was greater in proportion as Lady Agnes

failed to discover what was the matter. Her daughter Grace was much occupied with this question and brought it up in conversation in a manner irritating to her ladyship, who had a high theory of being silent about it, but who however, in the long run, was more unhappy when, in consequence of a reprimand, the girl suggested no reasons at all than when she suggested stupid ones. It eased Lady Agnes a little to discuss the mystery when she could have the air of not having begun.

The letter Nick received from her the first day of Passion Week in reply to his important communication was the only one he read at that moment; not counting of course several notes that Mrs. Dallow addressed to him from Griffin. There were letters piled up, as he knew, in Calcutta Gardens, which his servant had strict orders not to bring to the studio. Nick slept now in the bedroom attached to this retreat; got things as he wanted them from Calcutta Gardens; and dined at his club, where a stray surviving friend or two, seeing him prowling about the library in the evening, was free to suppose that such eccentricity had a crafty political basis. When he thought of his neglected letters he remembered Mr. Carteret's convictions on the subject of not "getting behind"; they made him laugh, in the slightly sonorous painting-room, as he bent over one of the old canvases that he had ventured to turn to the light. He was fully determined however to master his correspondence before going down, the last thing before Parliament should re-assemble, to spend another day at Beauchere. Mastering his correspondence meant in Nick's mind breaking open envelopes; writing answers was scarcely

involved in the idea. But Mr. Carteret would never guess that. Nick was not moved even to write to him that the affair with Mrs. Dallow was on the point of taking the form he had been so good as to desire : he reserved the pleasure of this announcement for a personal interview.

The day before Good Friday, in the morning, his stillness was broken by a rat-tat-tat on the outer door of his studio, administered apparently by the knob of a walking-stick. His servant was out and he went to the door, wondering who his visitor could be at such a time, especially of the familiar class. The class was indicated by the visitor's failure to look for the bell ; for there was a bell, though it required a little research. In a moment the mystery was solved : the gentleman who stood smiling at him from the threshold could only be Gabriel Nash. Dormer had not seen this whimsical personage for several months and had had no news of him beyond the general intimation that he was abroad. His old friend had sufficiently prepared him at the time of their reunion in Paris for the idea of the fitful in intercourse : and he had not been ignorant on his return from Paris that he should have had an opportunity to miss him if he had not been too busy to take advantage of it. In London, after the episode at Harsh, Gabriel had not reappeared : he had redeemed none of the pledges given the night they walked together to Notre Dame and conversed on important matters. He was to have interposed in Nick's destiny, but he had not interposed ; he was to have dragged him in the opposite sense from Mrs. Dallow, but there had been no dragging ; he was to have saved him, as he called it, and yet Nick was lost. This

circumstance indeed constituted his excuse: the member for Harsh had rushed so to perdition. Nick had for the hour seriously wished to keep hold of him: he valued him as a salutary influence. Yet when he came to his senses after his election our young man had recognized that Nash might very well have reflected on the thanklessness of such a slippery subject—might have considered that he was released from his vows. Of course it had been particularly in the event of a Liberal triumph that he had threatened to make himself felt; the effect of a brand plucked from the burning would be so much greater if the flames were already high. Yet Nick had not held him to the letter of this pledge, and had so fully admitted the right of a properly-constituted æsthete to lose patience with him that he was now far from greeting his visitor with a reproach. He felt much more thrown on his defence.

Gabriel did not attack him however. He brought in only blandness and benevolence and a great content at having obeyed the mystic voice—it was really a remarkable case of second sight—which had whispered to him that the recreant comrade of his prime was in town. He had just come back from Sicily, after a southern winter, according to a custom frequent with him, and had been moved by a miraculous prescience, unfavourable as the moment might seem, to go and ask for Nick in Calcutta Gardens, where he had extracted from his friend's servant an address not known to all the world. He showed Nick what a mistake it had been to fear a reproach from Gabriel Nash, and how he habitually ignored all lapses and kept up the standard only by taking a hundred

fine things for granted. He also abounded more than ever in his own sense, reminding his friend how no recollection of him, no evocation of him in absence could do him justice. You couldn't recall him without seeming to exaggerate him, and then recognized when you saw him that your exaggeration had fallen short. He emerged out of vagueness (his Sicily might have been the Sicily of "A Winter's Tale"), and would evidently be reabsorbed in it; but his presence was positive and pervasive enough. He was very lively while he lasted. His connections were with beauty, urbanity and conversation, as usual, but it was a circle you couldn't find in the *Court Guide*. Nick had a sense that he knew "a lot of æsthetic people," but he dealt in ideas much more than in names and addresses. He was genial and jocose, sunburnt and romantically allusive. Nick gathered that he had been living for many days in a Saracenic tower, where his principal occupation was to watch for the flushing of the west. He had retained all the serenity of his opinions, and made light, with a candour of which the only defect was apparently that it was not quite enough a conscious virtue, of many of the objects of common esteem. When Nick asked him what he had been doing he replied: "Oh, living, you know;" and the tone of the words seemed to offer them as a record of magnificent success. He made a long visit, staying to luncheon and after luncheon, so that the little studio heard all at once more conversation, and of a wider scope, than in the several previous years of its history. With much of our story left to tell, it is a pity that so little of this rich colloquy may be transcribed here; because, as affairs took their course,

it marked really (if it be a question of noting the exact point) a turn of the tide in Nick Dormer's personal situation. He was destined to remember the accent with which Nash exclaimed, on his drawing forth sundry specimens of amateurish earnestness: "I say—I say—I say!"

Nick glanced round with a heightened colour. "They're pretty bad, eh?"

"Oh, you're a deep one!" Nash went on.

"What's the matter?"

"Do you call your conduct that of a man of honour?"

"Scarcely, perhaps. But when no one has seen them!"

"That's your villainy. *C'est de l'exquis, du pur exquis.* Come, my dear fellow, this is very serious—it's a bad business," said Gabriel Nash. Then he added, almost with austerity: "You'll be so good as to place before me every patch of paint, every sketch and scrap that this room contains."

Nick complied, in great good-humour. He turned out his boxes and drawers, shovelled forth the contents of bulging portfolios, mounted on chairs to unhook old canvases that had been severely "skied." He was modest and docile and patient and amused, and above all quite thrilled—thrilled with the idea of eliciting a note of appreciation so late in the day. It was the oddest thing how at present in fact he found himself attributing value to Gabriel Nash—attributing to him, among attributions more confused, the dignity of judgment, the authority of intelligence. Nash was an ambiguous being, but he was an excellent touchstone. The two said very little for a while, and they had almost half an hour's silence, during which, after Nick had hastily improvised a little exhibition,

there was only a puffing of cigarettes. The visitor walked about, looking at this and that, taking up rough studies and laying them down, asking a question of fact, fishing with his umbrella, on the floor, amid a pile of unarranged sketches. Nick accepted jocosely the attitude of suspense, but there was even more of it in his heart than in his face. So few people had seen his young work—almost no one who really counted. He had been ashamed of it, never showing it to bring on a conclusion, inasmuch as it was precisely of a conclusion that he was afraid. He whistled now while he let his companion take time. He rubbed old panels with his sleeve and dabbed wet sponges on surfaces that had sunk. It was a long time since he had felt so gay, strange as such an assertion sounds in regard to a young man whose bridal day had at his urgent solicitation lately been fixed. He had stayed in town to be alone with his imagination, and suddenly, paradoxically, the sense of that result had arrived with Gabriel Nash.

“Nicholas Dormer,” this personage remarked at last, “for grossness of immorality I think I have never seen your equal.”

“That sounds so well that I hesitate to risk spoiling it by wishing it explained.”

“Don’t you recognize in *any* degree the elevated idea of duty?”

“If I don’t grasp it with a certain firmness I’m a great failure, for I was quite brought up in it,” Nick said.

“Then you are the wretchedest failure I know. Life is ugly, after all.”

"Do I gather that you yourself recognize obligations of the order you allude to?" asked Nick.

"Do you 'gather'?" Nash stared. "Why, aren't they the very flame of my faith, the burden of my song?"

"My dear fellow, duty is doing, and I inferred that you think rather poorly of doing—that it spoils one's style."

"Doing wrong, assuredly."

"But what do you call right? What's your canon of certainty there?"

"The conscience that's in us—that charming, conversible, infinite thing, the intensest thing we know. But you must treat the oracle civilly if you wish to make it speak. You mustn't stride into the temple in muddy jack-boots, with your hat on your head, as the Puritan troopers tramped into the dear old abbeys. One must do one's best to find out the right, and your criminality appears to be that you have not taken common trouble."

"I hadn't you to ask," smiled Nick. "But duty strikes me as doing *something*. If you are too afraid it may be the wrong thing, you may let everything go."

"Being is doing, and if doing is duty, being is duty. Do you follow?"

"At a great distance."

"To be what one *may* be, really and efficaciously," Nash went on, "to feel it and understand it, to accept it, adopt it, embrace it—that's conduct, that's life."

"And suppose one's a brute or an ass, where's the efficacy?"

"In one's very want of intelligence. In such cases one is

out of it—the question doesn't exist ; one simply becomes a part of the duty of others. The brute, the ass, neither feels, nor understands, nor accepts, nor adopts. Those fine processes in themselves classify us. They educate, they exalt, they preserve ; so that, to profit by them, we must be as perceptive as we can. We must recognize our particular form, the instrument that each of us—each of us who carries anything—carries in his being. Mastering this instrument, learning to play it in perfection—that's what I call duty, what I call conduct, what I call success."

Nick listened with friendly attention and the air of general assent was in his face as he said : "Every one has it then, this individual pipe?"

"‘Every one,’ my dear fellow, is too much to say, for the world is full of the crudest *remplissage*. The book of life is padded, ah but padded—a deplorable want of editing. I speak of every one that is any one. Of course there are pipes and pipes—little quavering flutes for the concerted movements and big *cornets-à-piston* for the great solos."

"I see, I see. And what might your instrument be?"

Nash hesitated not a moment ; his answer was radiantly ready. "To speak to people just as I am speaking to you. To prevent for instance a great wrong being done."

"A great wrong?"

"Yes—to the human race. I talk—I talk ; I say the things that other people don't, that they can't, that they won't," Gabriel continued, with his inimitable candour.

"If it's a question of mastery and perfection, you certainly have them," his companion replied.

“And you haven’t, alas; that’s the pity of it, that’s the scandal. That’s the wrong I want to set right, before it becomes too public a shame. I called you just now grossly immoral, on account of the spectacle you present—a spectacle to be hidden from the eye of ingenuous youth: that of a man neglecting his own fiddle to blunder away on that of one of his fellows. We can’t afford such mistakes, we can’t tolerate such license.”

“You think then I *have* a fiddle?” asked Nick.

“A regular Stradivarius! All these things you have shown me are singularly interesting. You have a talent of a wonderfully pure strain.”

“I say—I say—I say!” Nick exclaimed, standing in front of his visitor with his hands in his pockets and a blush on his smiling face, and repeating with a change of accent Nash’s exclamation of half an hour before.

“I like it, your talent; I measure it, I appreciate it, I insist upon it,” Nash went on, between the whiffs of his cigarette. “I have to be accomplished to do so, but fortunately I am. In such a case that’s my duty. I shall make you my business for a while. Therefore,” Nash added, piously, “don’t say I’m unconscious of the moral law.”

“A Stradivarius?” said Nick, interrogatively, with his eyes wide open and the thought in his mind of how different this was from having gone to Griffin.

X.

GABRIEL NASH had plenty of further opportunity to elucidate this and other figurative remarks, for he not only spent several of the middle hours of the day with his friend, but came back with him in the evening (they dined together at a little foreign pot-house in Soho, revealed to Nick on this occasion) and discussed the great question far into the night. The great question was whether, on the showing of those examples of his ability with which the room in which they sat was now densely bestrewn, Nick Dormer would be justified in "really going in" for the practice of pictorial art. This may strike many of my readers as a limited and even trivial inquiry, with little of the heroic or the romantic in it; but it was none the less carried to a very fine point by our clever young men. Nick suspected Nash of exaggerating his encouragement in order to play a malign trick on the political world, at whose expense it was his fancy to divert himself (without making that organization bankrupt assuredly), and reminded him that his present accusation of immorality was strangely inconsistent with the wanton hope expressed by him in Paris—the hope that the Liberal candidate at Harsh would be returned. Nash replied first: "Oh, I hadn't been in this place then!" but he defended himself more effectually in

saying that it was not of Nick's having got elected that he complained : it was of his visible hesitancy to throw up his seat. Nick requested that he wouldn't speak of this, and his gallantry failed to render him incapable of saying : "The fact is I haven't the nerve for it." They talked then for a while of what he could do, not of what he couldn't ; of the mysteries and miracles of reproduction and representation ; of the strong, sane joys of the artistic life. Nick made afresh, with more fullness, his great confession, that his private ideal of happiness was the life of a great painter of portraits. He uttered his thought about this so copiously and lucidly that Nash's own abundance was stilled, and he listened almost as if he had been listening to something new, difficult as it was to suppose that there could be a point of view in relation to such a matter with which he was unacquainted.

"There it is," said Nick at last—"there's the naked, preposterous truth : that if I were to do exactly as I liked I should spend my years copying the more or less vacuous countenances of my fellow-mortals. I should find peace and pleasure and wisdom and worth, I should find fascination and a measure of success in it : out of the din and the dust and the scramble, the world of party labels, party cries, party bargains and party treacheries—of humbuggery, hypocrisy and cant. The cleanness and quietness of it, the independent effort to do something, to leave something which shall give joy to man long after the howling has died away to the last ghost of an echo—such a vision solicits me at certain hours with an almost irresistible force."

As he dropped these remarks Nick lolled on a big divan,

with one of his long legs folded up ; and his visitor stopped in front of him, after moving about the room vaguely and softly, almost on tiptoe, not to interrupt him. "You speak with the eloquence that rises to a man's lips on a very particular occasion ; when he has practically, whatever his theory may be, renounced the right and dropped hideously into the wrong. Then his regret for the right, a certain exquisite appreciation of it, takes on an accent which I know well how to recognize."

Nick looked up at him a moment. "You've hit it, if you mean by that that I haven't resigned my seat and that I don't intend to."

"I thought you took it only to give it up. Don't you remember our talk in Paris?"

"I like to be a part of the spectacle that amuses you, but I could scarcely have taken so much trouble as that for it."

"But isn't it an absurd comedy, the life you lead?"

"Comedy or tragedy—I don't know which ; whatever it is I appear to be capable of it to please two or three people."

"Then you *can* take trouble," said Nash.

"Yes, for the woman I'm to marry."

"Ah, you're to marry?"

"That's what has come on since we met in Paris, and it makes just the difference."

"Ah, my poor friend," smiled Gabriel, standing there, "no wonder you have an eloquence, an accent!"

"It's a pity I have them in the wrong place. I'm expected to have them in the House of Commons."

“You will when you make your farewell speech there—to announce that you chuck it up. And may I venture to ask who’s to be your wife?” Gabriel went on.

“Mrs. Dallow has kindly consented. I think you saw her in Paris.”

“Ah, yes: you spoke of her to me. I remember asking you if you were in love with her.”

“I wasn’t then.”

Nash hesitated a moment. “And are you now?”

“Oh dear, yes,” said Nick.

“That would be better if it wasn’t worse.”

“Nothing could be better; it’s the best thing that can happen to me.”

“Well,” said Nash, “you must let me very respectfully approach her. You must let me bring her round.”

“Bring her round?”

“Talk her over.”

“Over to what?” Nick repeated his companion’s words, a little as if it were to gain time, remembering the effect Gabriel Nash had produced upon Julia—an effect which scantily ministered to the idea of another meeting. Julia had had no occasion to allude again to Nick’s imperturbable friend; he had passed out of her life at once and forever; but there flickered up a vivid recollection of the contempt he had led her to express, together with a sense of how odd she would think it that her intended should have thrown over two pleasant visits to cultivate such company.

“Over to a proper pride in what you may do—what you may do above all if she will help you.”

"I scarcely see how she can help me," said Nick, with an air of thinking.

"She's extremely handsome, as I remember her : you could do great things with her."

"Ah, there's the rub," Nick went on. "I wanted her to sit for me this week, but she wouldn't."

"*Elle a bien tort.* You should do some fine strong type. Is Mrs. Dallow in London?" Nash inquired.

"For what do you take her? She's paying visits."

"Then I have a model for you."

"Then you have—?" Nick stared. "What has that to do with Mrs. Dallow's being away?"

"Doesn't it give you more time?"

"Oh, the time flies!" sighed Nick, in a manner that caused his companion to break into a laugh—a laugh in which for a moment he himself joined, blushing a little.

"Does she like you to paint?" Nash continued, with one of his candid intonations.

"So she says."

"Well, do something fine to show her."

"I'd rather show it to you," Nick confessed.

"My dear fellow, I see it from here, if you do your duty. Do you remember the Tragic Muse?" Nash pursued, explicatively.

"The Tragic Muse?"

"That girl in Paris, whom we heard at the old actress's and whom we afterwards met at the charming entertainment given by your cousin (isn't he?) the secretary of embassy."

"Oh, Peter's girl : of course I remember her."

"Don't call her Peter's; call her rather mine," Nash said, with good-humoured dissuasiveness. "I invented her, I introduced her, I revealed her."

"I thought on the contrary you ridiculed and repudiated her."

"As an individual, surely not; I seem to myself to have been all the while rendering her services. I said I disliked tea-party ranters, and so I do; but if my estimate of her powers was below the mark she has more than punished me."

"What has she done?" asked Nick.

"She has become interesting, as I suppose you know."

"How should I know?"

"You must see her, you must paint her," said Nash. "She tells me that something was said about it that day at Madame Carré's."

"Oh, I remember—said by Peter."

"Then it will please Mr. Sherringham—you'll be glad to do that. I suppose you know all he has done for Miriam?"

"Not a bit. I know nothing about Peter's affairs, unless it be in general that he goes in for mountebanks and mimes and that it occurs to me I have heard one of my sisters mention—the rumour had come to her—that he has been backing Miss Rooth."

"Miss Rooth delights to talk of his kindness: she's charming when she speaks of it. It's to his good offices that she owes her appearance here."

"Here? Is she in London?" Nick inquired.

"*D'où tombez-vous?* I thought you people read the papers."

"What should I read, when I sit (sometimes!) through the stuff they put into them?"

"Of course I see that—that your engagement at your own theatre keeps you from going to others. Learn then," said Gabriel Nash, "that you have a great competitor and that you are distinctly not, much as you may suppose it, *the* rising comedian. The Tragic Muse is the great modern personage. Haven't you heard people speak of her, haven't you been taken to see her?"

"I dare say I've heard of her; but with a good many other things on my mind I had forgotten it."

"Certainly I can imagine what has been on your mind. She remembers you at any rate; she repays neglect with sympathy. She wants to come and see you."

"To see me?"

"To be seen by you—it comes to the same thing. She's worth seeing: you must let me bring her; you'll find her very suggestive. That idea that you should paint her—she appears to consider it a sort of bargain."

"A bargain? What will she give me?" Nick asked.

"A splendid model. She *is* splendid."

"Oh, then bring her," said Nick.

XI.

NASH brought her, the great modern personage as he had described her, the very next day, and it took Nick Dormer but a short time to appreciate his declaration that Miriam Rooth was splendid. She had made an impression upon him ten months before, but it had haunted him only for a day, immediately overlaid with other images. Yet after Nash had spoken of her a few moments he evoked her again; some of her attitudes, some of her tones began to hover before him. He was pleased in advance with the idea of painting her. When she stood there in fact however it seemed to him that he had remembered her wrong: the brilliant young lady who instantly filled his studio with a presence that it had never known was exempt from the curious clumsiness which had interfused his former admiration of her with a certain pity. Miriam Rooth was light and bright and straight to-day—straight without being stiff and bright without being garish. To Nick's perhaps inadequately sophisticated mind the model, the actress were figures with a vulgar setting; but it would have been impossible to show that taint less than his present extremely natural yet extremely distinguished visitor. She was more natural even than Gabriel Nash ("nature" was still Nick's formula for his old friend), and beside her he appeared almost commonplace.

Nash recognized her superiority with a frankness that was honourable to both of them, testifying in this manner to his sense that they were all three serious beings, worthy to deal with realities. She attracted crowds to her theatre, but to his appreciation of such a fact as that, important doubtless in its way, there were limits which he had already expressed. What he now felt bound in all integrity to express was his perception that she had, in general and quite apart from the question of the box-office, a remarkable, a very remarkable artistic nature. He confessed that she had surprised him there; knowing of her in other days mainly that she was hungry to adopt an overrated profession, he had not imputed to her the normal measure of intelligence. Now he saw—he had had some talks with her—that she *was* intelligent; so much so that he was sorry for the embarrassment it would be to her. Nick could imagine the discomfort of having that sort of commodity to dispose of in such conditions. “She’s a distinguished woman—really a distinguished woman,” Nash explained, kindly and lucidly, almost paternally; “and the head you can see for yourself.”

Miriam, smiling, as she sat on an old Venetian chair, held aloft, with the noblest effect, that portion of her person to which this patronage was extended, and remarked to Nick that, strange as it might appear, she had got quite to like poor Mr. Nash: she could make him go about with her; it was a relief to her mother.

“When I take him she has perfect peace,” the girl said; “then she can stay at home and see the interviewers. She delights in that and I hate it, so our friend here is a great

comfort. Of course a *femme de théâtre* is supposed to be able to go out alone, but there's a kind of appearance, an added *chic*, in having some one. People think he's my companion; I'm sure they fancy I pay him. I would pay him rather than give him up, for it doesn't matter that he's not a lady. He *is* one in tact and sympathy, as you see. And base as he thinks the sort of thing I do, he can't keep away from the theatre. When you're celebrated, people will look at you who before could never find out for themselves *why* they should."

"When you're celebrated you become handsomer; at least that's what has happened to you, though you were pretty too of old," Gabriel argued. "I go to the theatre to look at your head; it gives me the greatest pleasure. I take up anything of that sort as soon as I find it; one never knows how long it may last."

"Are you speaking of my appearance?" Miriam asked.

"Dear no, of my own pleasure, the first freshness," Nash went on. "Dormer at least, let me tell you in justice to him, hasn't waited till you were celebrated to want to see you again (he stands there open-eyed); for the simple reason that he hadn't the least idea of your renown. I had to announce it to him."

"Haven't you seen me act?" Miriam asked, without reproach, of her host.

"I'll go to-night," said Nick.

"You have your Parliament, haven't you? What do they call it—the demands of public life?" Miriam continued: to which Gabriel Nash rejoined that he had the demands of private as well, inasmuch as he was in love—he was on the

point of being married. Miriam listened to this with participation; then she said: "Ah, then, do bring your—what do they call her in English? I'm always afraid of saying something improper—your *future*. I'll send you a box, under the circumstances; you'd like that better." She added that if he were to paint her he would have to see her often on the stage, wouldn't he? to profit by the *optique de la scène* (what did they call *that* in English?) studying her and fixing his impression. Before he had time to respond to this proposition she asked him if it disgusted him to hear her speak like that, as if she were always posing and thinking about herself, living only to be looked at, thrusting forward her person. She often got sick of doing so, already; but *à la guerre comme à la guerre*.

"That's the fine artistic nature, you see—a sort of divine disgust breaking out in her," Nash expounded.

"If you want to paint me at all, of course. I'm struck with the way I'm taking that for granted," Miriam continued. "When Mr. Nash spoke of it to me I jumped at the idea. I remembered our meeting in Paris and the kind things you said to me. But no doubt one oughtn't to jump at ideas when they represent serious sacrifices on the part of others."

"Doesn't she speak well!" Nash exclaimed to Nick. "Oh, she'll go far!"

"It's a great privilege to me to paint you; what title in the world have I to pretend to such a model?" Nick replied to Miriam. "The sacrifice is yours—a sacrifice of time and good-nature and credulity. You come in your beauty and your genius to this shabby place where I've nothing to show,

not a guarantee to offer you ; and I wonder what I've done to deserve such a gift of the gods."

"Doesn't *he* speak well?" Nash demanded, smiling, of Miriam.

She took no notice of him, but she repeated to Nick that she hadn't forgotten his friendly attitude in Paris ; and when he answered that he surely had done very little she broke out, first resting her eyes on him a moment with a deep, reasonable smile and then springing up quickly : " Ah, well, if I must justify myself, I liked you ! "

" Fancy my appearing to challenge you ! " laughed Nick. " To see you again is to want tremendously to try something ; but you must have an infinite patience, because I'm an awful duffer. "

Miriam looked round the walls. " I see what you have done—*bien des choses*. "

" She understands—she understands, " Gabriel dropped. And he added to Miriam : " Imagine, when he might do something, his choosing a life of shams ! At bottom he's like you—a wonderful artistic nature. "

" I'll have patience, " said the girl, smiling at Nick.

" Then, my children, I leave you—the peace of the Lord be with you. " With these words Nash took his departure.

The others chose a position for Miriam's sitting, after she had placed herself in many different attitudes and different lights ; but an hour had elapsed before Nick got to work—began, on a large canvas, to knock her in, as he called it. He was hindered a little even by a certain nervousness, the emotion of finding himself, out of a clear sky, confronted with

such a sitter and launched in such a task. The situation was incongruous, just after he had formally renounced all manner of "art"—the renunciation taking effect not a bit the less from the whim that he had consciously treated himself to *as* a whim (the last he should ever indulge), the freak of relapsing for a fortnight into a fingering of old sketches, for the purpose, as he might have said, of burning them up, of clearing out his studio and terminating his lease. There were both embarrassment and inspiration in the strange chance of snatching back for an hour a relinquished joy: the jump with which he found he could still rise to such an occasion took away his breath a little, at the same time that the idea—the idea of what one might make of such material—touched him with an irresistible wand. On the spot, to his inner vision, Miriam became a magnificent result, drawing a hundred formative instincts out of their troubled sleep, defying him where he privately felt strongest and imposing herself triumphantly in her own strength. He had the good fortune to see her, as a subject, without striking matches, in a vivid light, and his quick attempt was as exciting as a sudden gallop—it was almost the sense of riding a runaway horse.

She was in her way so fine that he could only think how to "do" her: that hard calculation soon flattened out the consciousness, lively in him at first, that she was a beautiful woman who had sought him out in his retirement. At the end of their first sitting her having sought him out appeared the most natural thing in the world: he had a perfect right to entertain her there—explanations and complications were

engulfed in the productive mood. The business of "knocking her in" held up a lamp to her beauty, showed him how much there was of it and that she was infinitely interesting. He didn't want to fall in love with her (*that* would be a sell! as he said to himself), and she promptly became much too interesting for that. Nick might have reflected, for simplification's sake, as his cousin Peter had done, but with more validity, that he was engaged with Miss Rooth in an undertaking that didn't in the least refer to themselves, that they were working together seriously and that work was a suspension of sensibility. But after her first sitting (she came, poor girl, but twice), the need of such exorcisms passed from his spirit: he had so thoroughly, practically taken her up. As to whether Miriam had the same bright, still sense of co-operation to a definite end, the sense of the distinctively technical nature of the answer to every question to which the occasion might give birth, that mystery would be cleared up only if it were open to us to regard this young lady through some other medium than the mind of her friends. We have chosen, as it happens, for some of the advantages it carries with it, the indirect vision; and it fails as yet to tell us (what Nick of course wondered about before he ceased to care, as indeed he intimated to his visitor) why a young person crowned with success should have taken it into her head that there was something for her in so blighted a spot. She should have gone to one of the regular people, the great people: they would have welcomed her with open arms. When Nick asked her if some of the R. A.'s hadn't expressed a desire to have a crack at her she said: "Oh, dear, no, only

the tiresome photographers; and fancy *them*, in the future! If mamma could only do *that* for me!" And she added, with the charming fellowship for which she was conspicuous on this occasion: "You know I don't think any one yet has been quite so much struck with me as you."

"Not even Peter Sherringham?" asked Nick, laughing and stepping back to judge of the effect of a line.

"Oh, Mr. Sherringham's different. You're an artist."

"For heaven's sake, don't say that!" cried Nick. "And as regards your art I thought Peter knew more than any one."

"Ah, you're severe," said Miriam.

"Severe?"

"Because that's what he thinks. But he does know a lot—he has been a providence to me."

"And why hasn't he come here to see you act?"

Miriam hesitated a moment. "How do you know he hasn't come?"

"Because I take for granted he would have called on me if he had."

"Does he like you very much?" asked Miriam.

"I don't know. I like him."

"He's a gentleman—*pour cela*," said Miriam.

"Oh, yes, for that!" Nick went on absently, sketching hard.

"But he's afraid of me—afraid to see me."

"Doesn't he think you're good enough?"

"On the contrary—he believes I shall carry him away and he's in a terror of my doing it."

"He ought to like that," said Nick.

"That's what I mean when I say he's not an artist. However, he declares he does like it, only it appears it is not the right thing for him. Oh, the right thing—he's bent upon getting that. But it's not for me to blame him, for I am too. He's coming some night, however: he shall have a dose!"

"Poor Peter!" Nick exclaimed, with a compassion none the less real because it was mirthful: the girl's tone was so expressive of good-humoured, unscrupulous power.

"He's such a curious mixture," Miriam went on; "sometimes I lose patience with him. It isn't exactly trying to serve both God and Mammon, but it's muddling up the stage and the world. The world be hanged; the stage, or anything of that sort (I mean one's faith), comes first."

"Brava, brava, you do me good," Nick murmured, still hilarious and at his work. "But it's very kind of you, when I was in this absurd state of ignorance, to attribute to me the honour of having been more struck with you than any one else," he continued, after a moment.

"Yes, I confess I don't quite see—when the shops were full of my photographs."

"Oh, I'm so poor—I don't go into shops," returned Nick.

"Are you very poor?"

"I live on alms."

"And don't they pay you—the government, the ministry?"

"Dear young lady, for what?—for shutting myself up with beautiful women?"

"Ah, you have others, then?" asked Miriam.

"They are not so kind as you, I confess."

"I'll buy it from you—what you're doing: I'll pay you

well when it's done," said the girl. "I've got money now ; I make it, you know—a good lot of it. It's too delightful, after scraping and starving. Try it and you'll see. Give up the base, bad world."

"But isn't it supposed to be the base, bad world that pays?"

"Precisely ; make it pay, without mercy—squeeze it dry. That's what it's meant for—to pay for art. Ah, if it wasn't for that ! I'll bring you a quantity of photographs, to-morrow—you must let me come back to-morrow : it's so amusing to have them, by the hundred, all for nothing, to give away. That's what takes mamma most : she can't get over it. That's luxury and glory ; even at Castle Nugent they didn't do that. People used to sketch me, but not so much as mamma *veut bien le dire* ; and in all my life I never had but one poor little carte-de-visite, when I was sixteen, in a plaid frock, with the banks of a river, at three francs the dozen."

XII.

IT was success, Nick felt, that had made Miriam finer—the full possession of her talent and the sense of the recognition of it. There was an intimation in her presence (if he had given his mind to it) that for him too the same cause would produce the same effect—that is would show him that there is nothing like being launched in the practice of an art to learn what it may do for one. Nick felt clumsy beside a person who manifestly now had such an extraordinary familiarity with the point of view. He remembered too the inferiority that had been in his visitor—something clumsy and shabby, of quite another quality from her actual smartness, as London people would call it, her well-appointedness and her evident command of more than one manner. Handsome as she had been the year before, she had suggested provincial lodgings, bread-and-butter, heavy tragedy and tears; and if then she was an ill-dressed girl with thick hair who wanted to be an actress, she was already in a few weeks an actress who could act even at not acting. She showed what a light hand she could have, forbore to startle and looked as well for unprofessional life as Julia: which was only the perfection of her professional character.

This function came out much in her talk, for there were

many little bursts of confidence as well as many familiar pauses as she sat there; and she was ready to tell Nick the whole history of her *début*—the chance that had suddenly turned up and that she had caught with a jump as it passed. He missed some of the details, in his attention to his own task, and some of them he failed to understand, attached as they were to the name of Mr. Basil Dashwood, which he heard for the first time. It was through Mr. Dashwood's extraordinary exertions that a hearing—a morning performance at a London theatre—had been obtained for her. That had been the great step, for it had led to the putting on at night of the play at the same theatre, in place of a wretched thing they were trying (it was no use) to keep on its feet, and to her engagement for the principal part. She had made a hit in it (she couldn't pretend not to know that); but she was already tired of it, there were so many other things she wanted to do; and when she thought it would probably run a month or two more she was in the humour to curse the odious conditions of artistic production in such an age. The play was a simplified version of a new French piece, a thing that had taken in Paris, at a third-rate theatre, and had now, in London, proved itself good enough for houses mainly made up of ten-shilling stalls. It was Dashwood who had said it would go, if they could get the rights and a fellow to make some changes: he had discovered it at a nasty little theatre she had never been to, over the Seine. They had got the rights and the fellow who had made the changes was practically Dashwood himself; there was another man, in London, Mr. Gushmore—Miriam didn't know whether Nick would ever have heard of him

(Nick hadn't), who had done some of it. It had been awfully chopped down, to a mere bone, with the meat all gone; but that was what people in London seemed to like. They were very innocent, like little dogs amusing themselves with a bone. At any rate, she had made something, she had made a figure of the woman (a dreadful idiot, really, especially in what Dashwood had muddled her into); and Miriam added, in the complacency of her young expansion: "Oh, give me fifty words, any time, and the ghost of a situation, and I'll set you up a figure. Besides, I mustn't abuse poor Yolande—she has saved us," she said.

"Yolande?"

"Our ridiculous play. That's the name of the impossible woman. She has put bread into our mouths and she's a loaf on the shelf for the future. The rights are mine."

"You're lucky to have them," said Nick, a little vaguely, troubled about his sitter's nose, which was somehow Jewish without the convex arch.

"Indeed I am. He gave them to me. Wasn't it charming?"

"He gave them—Mr. Dashwood?"

"Dear me, no; where should poor Dashwood have got them? He hasn't a penny in the world. Besides, if he had got them he would have kept them. I mean your blessed cousin."

"I see—they're a present from Peter."

"Like many other things. Isn't he a dear? If it hadn't been for him the shelf would have remained bare. He bought the play for this country and America for four hundred pounds, and on the chance: fancy! There was no rush for it, and how could he tell? And then he gracefully handed

it to me. So I have my little capital. Isn't he a duck? You have nice cousins."

Nick assented to the proposition, only putting in an amendment to the effect that surely Peter had nice cousins also, and making, as he went on with his work, a tacit preoccupied reflection or two; such as that it must be pleasant to render little services like that to youth, beauty and genius (he rather wondered how Peter could afford them), and that, "duck" as he was, Miss Rooth's benefactor was rather taken for granted. *Sic vos non vobis* faintly murmured itself in Nick's brain. This community of interests, or at least of relations, quickened the flight of time, so that he was still fresh when the sitting came to an end. It was settled that Miriam should come back on the morrow, to enable her portrayer to make the most of the few days of the parliamentary recess; and just before she left she asked—

"Then you *will* come to-night?"

"Without fail. I hate to lose an hour of you."

"Then I'll place you. It will be my affair."

"You're very kind," he responded. "Isn't it a simple matter for me to take a stall? This week I suppose they're to be had."

"I'll send you a box," said Miriam. "You shall do it well. There are plenty now."

"Why should I be lost, all alone, in the grandeur of a box?"

"Can't you bring your friend?"

"My friend?"

"The lady you are engaged to."

“Unfortunately she’s out of town.”

Miriam looked at him with a grand profundity. “Does she leave you alone like that?”

“She thought I should like it—I should be more free to paint. You see I am.”

“Yes, perhaps it’s good for *me*. Have you got her portrait?” Miriam asked.

“She doesn’t like me to paint her.”

“Really? Perhaps then she won’t like you to paint me.”

“That’s why I want to be quick,” laughed Nick.

“Before she knows it?”

“She’ll know it to-morrow. I shall write to her.”

Miriam gave him another of her special looks; then she said: “I see; you’re afraid of her.” And she added, “Mention my name: they’ll give you the box at the theatre.”

Whether or no Nick were afraid of Mrs. Dallow, he still protested against receiving this bounty from the hands of Miss Rooth—repeated that he would rather take a stall according to his wont and pay for it. This led her to declare with a sudden flicker of passion that if he didn’t do as she wished she would never sit to him again.

“Ah then, you have me,” returned Nick. “Only I *don’t* see why you should give me so many things.”

“What in the world have I given you?”

“Why, an idea.” And Nick looked at his picture a little ruefully. “I don’t mean to say I haven’t let it fall and smashed it.”

“Ah, an idea—that is a great thing for people in our line. But you’ll see me much better from the box, and I’ll send you

Gabriel Nash," Miriam added, getting into the hansom which her host's servant had fetched for her. As Nick turned back into his studio after watching her drive away he laughed at the conception that they were in the same "line."

Nick shared his box at the theatre with Gabriel Nash, who talked during the entr'actes not in the least about the performance or the performer, but about the possible greatness of the art of the portraitist—its reach, its range, its fascination, the magnificent examples it had left us in the past: windows open into history, into psychology, things that were among the most precious possessions of the human race. He insisted, above all, on the interest, the richness arising from this great peculiarity of it: that, unlike most other forms, it was a revelation of two realities, the man whom it was the artist's conscious effort to reveal and the man (the interpreter) expressed in the very quality and temper of that effort. It offered a double vision, the strongest dose of life that art could give, the strongest dose of art that life could give. Nick Dormer had already become aware that he had two states of mind in listening to Gabriel Nash: one of them in which he laughed, doubted, sometimes even reprobated, and at any rate failed to follow or to accept; the other in which this contemplative genius seemed to take the words out of his mouth, to utter for him, better and more completely, the very things he was on the point of saying. Nash's saying them at such moments appeared to make them true, to set them up in the world, and to-night he said a good many, especially as to the happiness of cultivating one's own garden; growing there in stillness and freedom certain strong, pure flowers that would

bloom forever, long after the rank weeds of the hour were withered and blown away.

It was to keep Miriam Rooth in his eye for his object that Nick had come to the play; and she dwelt there all the evening, being constantly on the stage. He was so occupied in watching her face (for he now saw pretty clearly what he should attempt to make of it) that he was conscious only in a secondary degree of the story she illustrated, and in regard to her acting in particular had mainly a surprised sense that she was extraordinarily quiet. He remembered her loudness, her violence in Paris, at Peter Sherringham's, her wild wails, the first time, at Madame Carré's; compared with which her present manner was eminently temperate and modern. Nick Dormer was not critical at the theatre; he believed what he saw and had a pleasant sense of the inevitable; therefore he would not have guessed what Gabriel Nash had to tell him—that for Miriam, with her tragic cast and her peculiar attributes, her present performance, full of actuality, of light, fine indications and, in parts, of pointed touches of comedy, was a rare *tour de force*. It went on altogether in a register that he had not supposed her to possess; in which, as he said, she didn't touch her capital, doing it wholly with her little savings. It gave him the idea that she was capable of almost anything.

In one of the intervals they went round to see her; but for Nick this purpose was partly defeated by the wonderful amiability with which he was challenged by Mrs. Rooth, whom they found sitting with her daughter and who attacked him with a hundred questions about his dear mother and his charming sisters. She maintained that that day in Paris they

had shown her a kindness she should never forget. She abounded also in gracious expressions in regard to the portrait he had so cleverly begun, declaring that she was so eager to see it, however little he might as yet have accomplished, that she should do herself the honour to wait upon him in the morning, when Miriam came to sit.

"I'm acting for *you* to-night," the girl said to Nick, before he returned to his place.

"No, that's exactly what you are not doing," Nash interposed, with one of his intellectual superiorities. "You have stopped acting, you have reduced it to the least that will do, you simply *are*—you are just the visible image, the picture on the wall. It keeps you wonderfully in focus. I have never seen you so beautiful."

Miriam stared at this; then it could be seen that she coloured. "What a luxury in life to have everything explained! He's the great explainer," she said, turning to Nick.

He shook hands with her for good-night. "Well then, we must give him lots to do."

She came to his studio in the morning, but unaccompanied by her mother; in allusion to whom she simply said: "Mamma wished to come, but I wouldn't let her." They proceeded promptly to business. The girl divested herself of her hat and coat, taking the position already established for her. After they had worked for more than an hour, with much less talk than the day before, Nick being extremely absorbed and Miriam wearing in silence the kindest, most religious air of consideration for the sharp tension she imposed upon him—at the end of this period of patience, pervaded by a holy calm,

our young lady suddenly got up and exclaimed, "I say, I *must* see it!" with which, quickly, she stepped down from her place and came round to the canvas. She had, at Nick's request, not looked at his work the day before. He fell back, glad to rest, and put down his palette and brushes.

"*Ah bien, c'est tapé!*" Miriam cried, as she stood before the easel. Nick was pleased with her ejaculation, he was even pleased with what he had done; he had had a long, happy spurt and felt excited and sanctioned. Miriam, retreating also a little, sank into a high-backed, old-fashioned chair that stood two or three yards from the picture, and reclined in it, with her head on one side, looking at the rough resemblance. She made a remark or two about it, to which Nick replied standing behind her and after a moment leaning on the top of the chair. He was away from his work and his eyes searched it with a kind of fondness of hope. They rose, however, as he presently became conscious that the door of the large room opposite to him had opened without making a sound and that some one stood upon the threshold. The person on the threshold was Julia Dallow.

As soon as he perceived her Nick wished he had posted a letter to her the night before. He had written only that morning. Nevertheless there was genuine joy in the words with which he bounded towards her—"Ah, my dear Julia, what a jolly surprise!"—for her unannounced descent spoke to him above all of an irresistible desire to see him again sooner than they had arranged. She had taken a step forward, but she had done no more, stopping short at the sight of the strange woman, so divested of visiting-gear that she looked

half undressed, who lounged familiarly in the middle of the room and over whom Nick had been still more familiarly hanging. Julia's eyes rested on this embodied unexpectedness, and as they did so she grew pale—so pale that Nick, observing it, instinctively looked back to see what Miriam had done to produce such an effect. She had done nothing at all, which was precisely what was embarrassing; only staring at the intruder, motionless and superb. She seemed, somehow, in indolent possession of the place, and even in that instant Nick noted how handsome she looked; so that he exclaimed somewhere, inaudibly, in a region beneath his other emotions: "How I should like to paint her *that way*!" Mrs. Dallow transferred her eyes for a single moment to Nick's; then they turned away—away from Miriam, ranging over the room.

"I've got a sitter, but you mustn't mind that; we're taking a rest. I'm delighted to see you," said Nick. He closed the door of the studio behind her; his servant was still at the outer door, which was open and through which he saw Julia's carriage drawn up. This made her advance a little further, but still she said nothing; she dropped no answer even when Nick went on, with a sense of awkwardness: "When did you come back? I hope nothing has gone wrong. You come at a very interesting moment," he continued, thinking as soon as he had spoken that they were such words as might have made her laugh. She was far from laughing; she only managed to look neither at him nor at Miriam and to say, after a little, when he had repeated his question about her return:

"I came back this morning—I came straight here."

"And nothing's wrong, I hope?"

“Oh, no—everything’s all right,” she replied very quickly and without expression. She vouchsafed no explanation of her premature return and took no notice of the seat Nick offered her; neither did she appear to hear him when he begged her not to look yet at the work on the easel—it was in such a dreadful state. He was conscious, as he phrased it, that his request gave to Miriam’s position directly in front of his canvas an air of privilege which her neglect to recognize in any way Mrs. Dallow’s entrance or her importance did nothing to correct. But that mattered less if the appeal failed to reach Julia’s intelligence, as he judged, seeing presently how deeply she was agitated. Nothing mattered in face of the sense of danger which took possession of him after she had been in the room a few moments. He wanted to say: “What’s the difficulty? Has anything happened?” but he felt that she would not like him to utter words so intimate in presence of the person she had been rudely startled to find between them. He pronounced Miriam’s name to Mrs. Dallow and Mrs. Dallow’s to Miriam, but Julia’s recognition of the ceremony was so slight as to be scarcely perceptible. Miriam had the air of waiting for something more before she herself made a sign; and as nothing more came she continued to be silent and not to budge. Nick added a remark to the effect that Mrs. Dallow would remember to have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Rooth the year before—in Paris, that day, at her brother Peter’s; to which Mrs. Dallow rejoined, “Ah, yes,” without any qualification, while she looked down at some rather rusty studies, on panels, which were ranged along the floor, resting against the base of the wall. Her agitation was evidently a

pain to herself ; she had had a shock of extreme violence, and Nick saw that as Miriam showed no symptom of offering to give up her sitting her stay would be of the briefest. He wished Miriam would do something—say she would go, get up, move about ; as it was she had the appearance of watching from her point of vantage Mrs. Dallow's discomfiture. He made a series of inquiries about Julia's doings in the country, to two or three of which she gave answers monosyllabic and scarcely comprehensible, while she turned her eyes round and round the room as if she were looking for something she couldn't find—for an escape, for something that was not Miriam. At last she said—it was at the end of a very few minutes :

“I didn't come to stay—when you're so busy. I only looked in to see if you were here. Good-bye.”

“It's charming of you to have come. I'm so glad you've seen for yourself how well I'm occupied,” Nick replied, not unaware that he was very red. This made Mrs. Dallow look at him, while Miriam considered them both. Julia's eyes had something in them that he had never seen before—a flash of fright by which he was himself frightened. “Of course I'll see you later,” he added, laughing awkwardly, while she reached the door, while she opened it herself and got off without a good-day to Miriam. “I wrote to you this morning—you've missed my letter,” he repeated behind her, having already given her this information. The door of the studio was very near that of the house, but before Mrs. Dallow had reached the street the visitors' bell was set ringing. The passage was narrow and she kept in advance of Nick, anticipating his motion to open the street-door. The bell was

tinkling still when, by the action of her own hand, a gentleman on the step stood revealed.

"Ah my dear, don't go!" Nick heard pronounced in quick, soft dissuasion and in the now familiar accents of Gabriel Nash. The rectification followed more quickly still, if that were a rectification which scarcely improved the matter: "I beg a thousand pardons. I thought you were Miriam."

Gabriel gave way, and Mrs. Dallow dashed out of the house. Her carriage, a victoria with a pair of horses who had got hot, had taken a turn up the street, but the coachman had already perceived his mistress and was rapidly coming back. He drew near; not so fast however but that Gabriel Nash had time to accompany Mrs. Dallow to the edge of the pavement with an apology for the freedom into which he had blundered. Nick was at her other hand, waiting to put her into her carriage and freshly disconcerted by the encounter with Nash, who somehow, as he stood making Julia an explanation that she didn't listen to, looked less eminent than usual, though not more conscious of difficulties. Nick coloured deeper and watched the footman spring down as the victoria drove up; he heard Nash say something about the honour of having met Mrs. Dallow in Paris. Nick wanted him to go into the house; he damned inwardly his want of delicacy. He desired a word with Julia alone—as much alone as the two inconvenient servants would allow. But Nash was not too much discouraged to say: "You came for a glimpse of the great model? *Doesn't* she sit? That's what I wanted too, this morning—just a look, for a blessing on the day. Ah, but *you*, madam—"

Julia had sprung into the carriage while he was still speaking and had flashed out to the coachman a "Home!" which of itself set the vehicle in motion. The carriage went a few yards, but while Gabriel, with a magnificent bow, turned away, Nick Dormer, with his hand on the edge of the hood, moved with it.

"You don't like it, but I'll explain," he said, laughing and in a low tone.

"Explain what?" Mrs. Dallow asked, still very pale and grave, but showing nothing in her voice. She was thinking of the servants. She could think of them even then.

"Oh, it's all right. I'll come in at five," Nick returned, gallantly jocular, while the carriage rolled away..

Gabriel had gone into the studio and Nick found him standing in admiration before Miriam, who had resumed the position in which she was sitting.

"Lord, she's good to-day! Isn't she good to-day?" Nash broke out, seizing Nick by the arm to give him a certain view. Miriam looked indeed still handsomer than before, and she had taken up her attitude again with a splendid sphinx-like air of being capable of keeping it forever. Nick said nothing, but he went back to work with a tingle of confusion, which proved in fact, when he resumed his palette, to be a sharp and, after a moment, a delightful stimulus. Miriam spoke never a word, but she was doubly grand, and for more than an hour, till Nick, exhausted, declared he must stop, the industrious silence was broken only by the desultory discourse of Gabriel Nash.

XIII.

NICK DORMER went to Great Stanhope Street at five o'clock and learned, rather to his surprise, that Mrs. Dallow was not at home—to his surprise because he had told her he would come at that hour, and he attributed to her, with a certain simplicity, an eager state of mind in regard to his explanation. Apparently she was not eager; the eagerness was his own—he was eager to explain. He recognized, not without a certain consciousness of magnanimity in doing so, that there had been some reason for her quick withdrawal from his studio, or at any rate for her extreme discomposure there. He had a few days before put in a plea for a snatch of worship in that sanctuary, and she had accepted and approved it; but the worship, when the curtain happened to blow back, proved to be that of a magnificent young woman, an actress with disordered hair, who wore in a singular degree the aspect of a person settled to spend the day. The explanation was easy: it resided in the circumstance that when one was painting, even very badly and only for a moment, one had to have models. Nick was impatient to give it, with frank, affectionate lips and a full, jocose admission that it was natural Julia should have been startled; and he was the more impatient that, though he would not in the least have expected her to

like finding a strange woman domesticated for the hour under his roof, she had disliked it even more than would have seemed probable. That was because, not having heard from him about the matter, the impression was for the moment irresistible with her that a trick had been played her. But three minutes with him alone would make the difference.

They would indeed have a considerable difference to make, Nick reflected, as minutes much more numerous elapsed without bringing Mrs. Dallow home. For he had said to the butler that he would come in and wait (though it was odd she should not have left a message for him): she would doubtless return from one moment to the other. Nick had of course full license to wait, anywhere he preferred; and he was ushered into Julia's particular sitting-room and supplied with tea and the evening papers. After a quarter of an hour however he gave little attention to these beguilements, owing to the increase of his idea that it was odd that when she definitely knew he was coming she should not have taken more pains to be at home. He walked up and down and looked out of the window, took up her books and dropped them again, and then, as half an hour had elapsed, began to feel rather angry. What could she be about when, at a moment when London was utterly empty, she could not be paying visits? A footman came in to attend to the fire; whereupon Nick questioned him as to the manner in which Mrs. Dallow was probably engaged. The man revealed the fact that his mistress had gone out only a quarter of an hour before Nick arrived, and, as if he appreciated the opportunity for a little decorous conversation, gave him still more information than he asked for. From this it

appeared that, as Nick knew or could surmise, she had the evening previous, in the country, telegraphed for the victoria to meet her in the morning at Paddington and had gone straight from the station to the studio, while her maid, with her luggage, proceeded in a cab to Great Stanhope Street. On leaving the studio however she had not come directly home ; she had chosen this unusual season for an hour's drive in the Park. She had finally re-entered her house, but had remained up-stairs all day, seeing no one and not coming down to luncheon. At four o'clock she had ordered the brougham for four forty-five, and had got into it punctually, saying "To the Park!" as she did so.

Nick, after the footman had left him, felt himself much mystified by Julia's sudden passion for the banks of the Serpentine, forsaken and foggy now, inasmuch as the afternoon had come on gray and the light was waning. She usually hated the Park and she hated a closed carriage. He had a discomfutable vision of her, shrunken into a corner of her brougham and veiled as if she had been crying, revolving round the solitude of the Drive. She had of course been deeply disconcerted, and she was nervous and upset: the motion of the carriage soothed her and made her fidget less. Nick remembered that in the morning, at his door, she had appeared to be going home ; so she had turned into the Park on second thoughts, as she passed. He lingered another half hour, walked up and down the room many times and thought of many things. Had she misunderstood him when he said he would come at five? Couldn't she be sure, even if she had, that he would come early rather than late, and might she not

have left a message for him on the chance? Going out that way a few minutes before he was to come had even a little the air of a thing done on purpose to offend him; as if she had been so displeased that she had taken the nearest occasion of giving him a sign that she meant to break. But were these the things that Julia did and was that the way she did them—his fine, proud, delicate, generous Julia?

When six o'clock came poor Nick felt distinctly resentful; but he stayed ten minutes longer, on the possibility that Mrs. Dallow would in the morning have understood him to mention that hour. The April dusk began to gather and the unsociability of her behaviour, especially if she were still rumbling about the Park, became absurd. Anecdotes came back to Nick, vaguely remembered, heard he couldn't have said when or where, of poor artists for whom life had been rendered difficult by wives who wouldn't allow them the use of the living female model and who made scenes if, on the staircase, they encountered such sources of inspiration. These ladies struck him as vulgar and odious persons, with whom it seemed grotesque that Julia should have anything in common. Of course she was not his wife yet, and of course if she were he should have washed his hands of every form of activity requiring the services of the sitter; but even these qualifications left him with a capacity to shudder at the way Julia just escaped ranking herself with the heavy-handed.

At a quarter-past six he rang a bell and told the servant who answered it that he was going and that Mrs. Dallow was to be informed as soon as she came in that he had expected to find her and had waited an hour and a quarter for her. But

he had just reached the doorstep, on his departure, when her brougham, emerging from the evening mist, stopped in front of the house. Nick stood at the door, hanging back till she got out, allowing the servants to help her. She saw him—she was not veiled, like his mental image of her; but this did not prevent her from pausing to give an order to the coachman, a matter apparently requiring some discussion. When she came to the door Nick remarked to her that he had been waiting an eternity for her; to which she replied that he must not make a grievance to her of that—she was too unwell to do justice to it. He immediately professed regret and sympathy, adding, however, that in that case she had much better not have gone out. She made no answer to this—there were three servants in the hall who looked as if they might understand at least what was *not* said to them: only when he followed her in she asked if his idea had been to stay longer.

“Certainly, if you’re not too ill to see me.”

“Come in, then,” Julia said, turning back after having gone to the foot of the stairs.

This struck him immediately as a further restriction of his visit: she would not readmit him to the drawing-room or to her boudoir; she would receive him in an impersonal apartment down-stairs, in which she saw people on business. What did she want to do to him? He was prepared by this time for a scene of jealousy; for he was sure he had learned to read her character justly in feeling that if she had the appearance of a cold woman she had also on certain occasions a liability to extreme emotion. She was very still, but every now and

then she would fire off a pistol. As soon as Nick had closed the door she said, without sitting down :

"I dare say you saw I didn't like that at all."

"My having a sitter, that way? I was very much annoyed at it myself," Nick answered.

"Why were you annoyed? She's very handsome," said Mrs. Dallow, perversely.

"I didn't know you looked at her!" Nick laughed.

Julia hesitated a moment. "Was I very rude?"

"Oh, it was all right. It was only awkward for me, because you didn't know," Nick replied.

"I did know; that's why I came."

"How do you mean? My letter couldn't have reached you."

"I don't know anything about your letter," said Mrs. Dallow, casting about her for a chair and then seating herself on the edge of a sofa, with her eyes on the floor.

"She sat to me yesterday; she was there all the morning; but I didn't write to tell you. I went at her with great energy and, absurd as it may seem to you, found myself very tired afterwards. Besides, in the evening I went to see her act."

"Does she act?" asked Mrs. Dallow.

"She's an actress; it's her profession. Don't you remember her that day at Peter's, in Paris? She's already a celebrity; she has great talent; she's engaged at a theatre here and is making a sensation. As I tell you, I saw her last night."

"You needn't tell me," Mrs. Dallow replied, looking up at him with a face of which the intense, the tragic sadness startled him.

He had been standing before her, but at this he instantly

sat down beside her, taking her passive hand. "I want to, please; otherwise it must seem so odd to you. I knew she was coming when I wrote to you the day before yesterday. But I didn't tell you then, because I didn't know how it would turn out and I didn't want to exult in advance over a poor little attempt that might come to nothing. Moreover it was no use speaking of the matter at all unless I told you exactly how it came about," Nick went on, explaining kindly, copiously. "It was the result of a visit unexpectedly paid me by Gabriel Nash."

"That man—the man who spoke to me?" Julia asked, startled into a shuddering memory.

"He did what he thought would please you, but I dare say it didn't. You met him in Paris and didn't like him; so I thought it best to hold my tongue about him."

"Do *you* like him?"

"Very much."

"Great heaven!" Julia ejaculated, almost under her breath.

"The reason I was annoyed was because, somehow, when you came in, I suddenly had the air of having got out of those visits and shut myself up in town to do something that I had kept from you. And I have been very unhappy till I could explain."

"You don't explain—you can't explain," Mrs. Dallow declared, turning on her companion eyes which, in spite of her studied stillness, expressed deep excitement. "I knew it—I knew everything; that's why I came."

"It was a sort of second-sight—what they call a brain-wave," Nick smiled.

"I felt uneasy, I felt a kind of call ; it came suddenly, yesterday. It was irresistible ; nothing could have kept me this morning."

"That's very serious, but it's still more delightful. You mustn't go away again," said Nick. "We must stick together—forever and ever."

He put his arm round her, but she detached herself as soon as she felt its pressure. She rose quickly, moving away, while, mystified, he sat looking up at her as she had looked a few moments before at him. "I've thought it all over ; I've been thinking of it all day," she began. "That's why I didn't come in."

"Don't think of it too much ; it isn't worth it."

"You like it more than anything else. You do—you can't deny it," she went on.

"My dear child, what are you talking about?" Nick asked, gently.

"That's what you like—doing what you were this morning ; with women lolling, with their things off, to be painted, and people like that man."

Nick slowly got up, hesitating. "My dear Julia, apart from the surprise, this morning, do you object to the living model?"

"Not a bit, for you."

"What's the inconvenience, then, since in my studio they are only for me?"

"You love it, you revel in it ; that's what you want, and that's the only thing you want!" Julia broke out.

"To have models, lolling women, do you mean?"

"That's what I felt, what I knew, what came over me and haunted me yesterday, so that I couldn't throw it off. It seemed to me that if I could see it with my eyes and have the perfect proof I should feel better, I should be quiet. And now I *am*—after a struggle of some hours, I confess. I *have* seen ; the whole thing's clear and I'm satisfied."

"I'm not, and to me the whole thing isn't clear. What exactly are you talking about ?" Nick demanded.

"About what you were doing this morning. That's your innermost preference, that's your secret passion."

"A little go at something serious? Yes, it was almost serious," said Nick. "But it was an accident, this morning and yesterday : I got on better than I intended."

"I'm sure you have immense talent," Mrs. Dallow remarked, with a joylessness that was almost droll.

"No, no, I might have had. I've plucked it up : it's too late for it to flower. My dear Julia, I'm perfectly incompetent and perfectly resigned."

"Yes, you looked so this morning, when you hung over her. Oh, she'll bring back your talent !"

"She's an obliging and even an intelligent creature, and I've no doubt she would if she could. But I've received from *you* all the help that any woman is destined to give me. No one can do for me again what you have done."

"I shouldn't try it again ; I acted in ignorance. Oh, I've thought it all out !" Julia declared. Then, with a strange face of anguish resting on his, she said : "Before it's too late —before it's too late !"

"Too late for what ?"

"For you to be free—for you to be free. And for me—for me to be free too. You hate everything I like!" she exclaimed, with a trembling voice. "Don't pretend, don't pretend!" she went on, as a sound of protest broke from him.

"I thought you wanted me to paint," protested Nick, flushed and staring.

"I do—I do. That's why you must be free, why we must part."

"Why we must part?"

"Oh, I've turned it over. I've faced the truth. It wouldn't do at all," said Mrs. Dallow.

"I like the way you talk of it, as if it were a trimming for your dress!" Nick rejoined, with bitterness. "Won't it do for you to be loved and cherished as well as any woman in England?"

Mrs. Dallow turned away from him, closing her eyes as if not to see something that would be dangerous to her. "You mustn't give anything up for me. I should feel it all the while and I should hate it. I'm not afraid of the truth, but you are."

"The truth, dear Julia? I only want to know it," said Nick. "It seems to me I've got hold of it. When two persons are united by the tenderest affection and are sane and generous and just, no difficulties that occur in the union their life makes for them are insurmountable, no problems are insoluble."

Mrs. Dallow appeared for a moment to reflect upon this; it was spoken in a tone that might have touched her. At any rate at the end of the moment, lifting her eyes, she announced:

"I hate art, as you call it. I thought I did, I knew I did; but till this morning I didn't know how much."

"Bless your soul, *that* wasn't art," pleaded Nick. "The real thing will be a thousand miles away from us; it will never come into the house, *soyez tranquille*. Why then should you worry?"

"Because I want to understand, I want to know what I'm doing. You're an artist: you are, you are!" Mrs. Dallow cried, accusing him passionately.

"My poor Julia, it isn't so easy as that, nor a character one can take on from one day to the other. There are all sorts of things; one must be caught young and put through the mill and see things as they are. There would be sacrifices I never can make."

"Well then, there are sacrifices for both of us, and I can't make them either. I dare say it's all right for you, but for me it would be a terrible mistake. When I think I'm doing something I mustn't do just the opposite," Julia went on, as if she wished to explain and be clear. "There are things I've thought of, the things I like best; and they are not what you mean. It would be a great deception, and it's not the way I see my life, and it would be misery if we don't understand."

Nick looked at her in hard perplexity, for she did not succeed in explaining as well as she wished. "If we don't understand what?"

"That we are awfully different—that you are doing it all for me."

"And is that an objection to me—what I do for you?" asked Nick.

“ You do too much. You’re awfully good, you’re generous, you’re a dear fellow ; but I don’t believe in it. I didn’t, at bottom, from the first—that’s why I made you wait, why I gave you your freedom. Oh, I’ve suspected you ! I had my ideas. It’s all right for you, but it won’t do for me : I’m different altogether. Why should it always be put upon me, when I hate it ? What have I done ? I was drenched with it, before.” These last words, as they broke forth, were accompanied, even as the speaker uttered them, with a quick blush ; so that Nick could as quickly discern in them the uncalculated betrayal of an old irritation, an old shame almost—her late husband’s flat, inglorious taste for pretty things, his indifference to every chance to play a public part. This had been the mortification of her youth, and it was indeed a perversity of fate that a new alliance should contain for her even an oblique demand for the same spirit of accommodation, impose on her the secret bitterness of the same concessions. As Nick stood there before her, struggling sincerely with the force that he now felt to be strong in her, the intense resolution to break with him, a force matured in a few hours, he read a riddle that hitherto had baffled him, saw a great mystery become simple. A personal passion for him had all but thrown her into his arms (the sort of thing that even a vain man—and Nick was not especially vain—might hesitate to recognize the strength of) ; held in check, with a tension of the cord at moments of which he could still feel the vibration, by her deep, her rare ambition, and arrested at the last only just in time to save her calculations. His present glimpse of the immense extent of these calculations did not make him think

her cold or poor ; there was in fact a positive strange heat in them and they struck him rather as grand and high. The fact that she could drop him even while she longed for him—drop him because it was now fixed in her mind that he would not after all serve her determination to be associated, so far as a woman could, with great affairs ; that she could postpone, and postpone to an uncertainty, the satisfaction of a gnawing tenderness and judge for the long run—this exhibition of will and courage, of the large plan that possessed her, commanded his admiration on the spot. He paid the heavy penalty of being a man of imagination ; he was capable of far excursions of the spirit, disloyalties to habit and even to faith, and open to wondrous communications. He ached for the moment to convince her that he would achieve what he wouldn't, for the vision of his future that she had tried to entertain shone before him as a bribe and a challenge. It seemed to him there was nothing he couldn't fancy enough, to be so fancied by her. Presently he said :

“ You want to be sure the man you marry will be prime minister of England. But how can you be sure, with any one ? ”

“ I can be sure some men won't,” Mrs. Dallow replied.

“ The only safe thing, perhaps, would be to marry Mr. Macgeorge,” Nick suggested.

“ Possibly not even him.”

“ You're a prime minister yourself,” Nick answered. “ To hold fast to you as I hold, to be determined to be of your party—isn't that political enough, since you are the incarnation of politics ? ”

"Ah, how you hate them!" Julia moaned. "I saw that when I saw you this morning. The whole place reeked of it."

"My dear child, the greatest statesmen have had their distractions. What do you make of my hereditary talent? That's a tremendous force."

"It wouldn't carry you far." Then Mrs. Dallow added: "You must be a great artist." Nick gave a laugh at the involuntary contempt of this, but she went on: "It's beautiful of you to want to give up anything, and I like you for it. I shall always like you. We shall be friends, and I shall always take an interest—"

He stopped her at this, made a movement which interrupted her phrase, and she suffered him to hold her hand as if she were not afraid of him now. "It isn't only for you," he argued gently; "you're a great deal, but you're not everything. Innumerable vows and pledges repose upon my head. I'm inextricably committed and dedicated. I was brought up in the temple; my father was a high priest and I'm a child of the Lord. And then the life itself—when *you* speak of it I feel stirred to my depths: it's like a herald's trumpet. Fight *with* me, Julia—not against me! Be on my side, and we shall do everything. It *is* fascinating, to be a great man before the people—to be loved by them, to be followed by them. An artist isn't—never, never. Why *should* he be? Don't forget how clever I am."

"Oh, if it wasn't for that!" she rejoined, flushed with the effort to resist his tone. She asked abruptly: "Do you pretend that if I were to die to-morrow you would stay in the House?"

"If you were to die? God knows! But you do singularly little justice to my incentives," Nick continued. "My political career is everything to my mother."

Julia hesitated a moment; then she inquired: "Are you afraid of your mother?"

"Yes, particularly; for she represents infinite possibilities of disappointment and distress. She represents all my father's as well as all her own; and in them my father tragically lives again. On the other hand I see him in bliss, as I see my mother, over our marriage and our life of common aspirations; though of course that's not a consideration that I can expect to have power with you."

Mrs. Dallow shook her head slowly, even smiling a little with an air of recovered calmness and lucidity. "You'll never hold high office."

"But why not take me as I am?"

"Because I'm abominably keen about that sort of thing; I must recognize it. I must face the ugly truth. I've been through the worst; it's all settled."

"The worst, I suppose, was when you found me this morning."

"Oh, that was all right—for you."

"You're magnanimous, Julia; but evidently what's good enough for me isn't good enough for you." Nick spoke with bitterness.

"I don't like you enough—that's the obstacle," said Mrs. Dallow bravely.

"You did a year ago; you confessed to it."

"Well, a year ago was a year ago. Things are changed to-day."

"You're very fortunate—to be able to throw away a devotion," Nick replied.

Julia had her pocket-handkerchief in her hand, and at this she quickly pressed it to her lips, as if to check an exclamation. Then for an instant she appeared to be listening as if for a sound from outside. Nick interpreted her movement as an honourable impulse to repress the words: "Do you mean the devotion that I was witness of this morning?" But immediately afterwards she said something very different: "I thought I heard a ring. I've telegraphed for Mrs. Gresham."

"Why did you do that?" asked Nick.

"Oh, I want her."

He walked to the window, where the curtains had not been drawn, and saw in the dusk a cab at the door. When he turned back he said: "Why won't you trust me to make you like me, as you call it, better? If I make you like me as well as I like you, it will be about enough, I think."

"Oh, I like you enough for *your* happiness. And I don't throw away a devotion," Mrs. Dallow continued. "I shall be constantly kind to you. I shall be beautiful to you."

"You'll make me lose a fortune," declared Nick.

Julia stared, then she coloured. "Ah, you may have all the money you want."

"I don't mean yours," he answered, flushing in his turn. He had determined on the instant, since it might serve, to tell her what he had never spoken of to her before. "Mr. Carteret last year promised me a pot of money on the day I should stand up with you. He has set his heart on our marriage."

"I'm sorry to disappoint Mr. Carteret," said Julia. "I'll go and see him. I'll make it all right," she went on. "Besides, you'll make a fortune by your portraits. The great men get a thousand, just for a head."

"I'm only joking," Nick returned, with sombre eyes that contradicted this profession. "But what things you deserve I should do!"

"Do you mean striking likenesses?"

"You do hate it! Pushed to that point, it's curious," the young man audibly mused.

"Do you mean you're joking about Mr. Carteret's promise?"

"No, the promise is real; but I don't seriously offer it as a reason."

"I shall go to Beauclere," said Mrs. Dallow. "You're an hour late," she added in a different tone; for at that moment the door of the room was thrown open and Mrs. Gresham, the butler pronouncing her name, was ushered in.

"Ah, don't impugn my punctuality; it's my character!" the useful lady exclaimed, putting a sixpence from the cabman into her purse. Nick went off, at this, with a simplified farewell—went off foreseeing exactly what he found the next day, that Mrs. Gresham would have received orders not to budge from her hostess's side. He called on the morrow, late in the afternoon, and Julia saw him liberally, in pursuance of her assertion that she would be "beautiful" to him, that she had not thrown away his devotion; but Mrs. Gresham remained immutably a spectator of her liberality. Julia looked at him kindly, but her companion was more benignant still; so that what Nick did with his own eyes was not to appeal

to Mrs. Dallow to see him for a moment alone, but to solicit, in the name of this luxury, the second occupant of the drawing-room. Mrs. Gresham seemed to say, while Julia said very little: "I understand, my poor friend, I know everything (she has told me only *her* side, but I'm so competent that I know yours too), and I enter into the whole thing deeply. But it would be as much as my place is worth to accommodate you." Still, she did not go so far as to give him an inkling of what he learned on the third day and what he had not gone so far as to suspect—that the two ladies had made rapid arrangements for a scheme of foreign travel. These arrangements had already been carried out when, at the door of the house in Great Stanhope Street, the fact was imparted to Nick that Mrs. Dallow and her friend had started that morning for Paris.

XIV.

ON their way to Florence, Julia Dallow and Mrs. Gresham spent three days in Paris, where Peter Sherringham had as much conversation with his sister as it often befell one member of that family to have with another. That is on two different occasions he enjoyed half an hour's gossip with her in her sitting-room at the hotel. On one of these occasions he took the liberty of asking her whether or no definitely, she meant to marry Nick Dormer. Julia expressed to him that she was much obliged for his interest, but that Nick and she were nothing more than relations and good friends. "He wants to marry you, tremendously," Peter remarked ; to which Mrs. Dallow simply made answer : " Well, then, he may want ! "

After this they sat silent for some moments, as if the subject had been quite threshed out between them. Peter felt no impulse to penetrate further, for it was not a habit of the Sherringtons to talk with each other of their love-affairs ; and he was conscious of the particular deterrent that he and Julia had in general so different a way of feeling that they could never go far together in discussion. He liked her and was sorry for her, thought her life lonely and wondered she didn't make a " great " marriage. Moreover he pitied

her for being without the interests and consolations that he had found substantial: those of the intellectual, the studious order he considered these to be, not knowing how much she supposed that she reflected and studied or what an education she had found in her political aspirations, regarded by him as scarcely more a personal part of her than the livery of her servants or the jewels George Dallow's money had bought. Her relations with Nick were unfathomable to him; but they were not his affair. No affair of Julia's was sufficiently his to justify him in an attempt to understand it. That there should have been any question of her marrying Nick was the anomaly to him, rather than that the question should have been dropped. He liked his clever cousin very well as he was—enough to have a vague sense that he might be spoiled by being altered into a brother-in-law. Moreover, though he was not perhaps distinctly conscious of this, Peter pressed lightly on Julia's doings from a tacit understanding that in this case she would let him off as easily. He could not have said exactly what it was that he judged it pertinent to be let off from: perhaps from irritating inquiry as to whether he had given any more tea-parties for young ladies connected with the theatre.

Peter's forbearance however did not bring him all the security he prefigured. After an interval he indeed went so far as to ask Julia if Nick had been wanting in respect to her; but this was a question intended for sympathy, not for control. She answered: "Dear, no—though he's very provoking." Thus Peter guessed that they had had a quarrel in which it didn't concern him to interpose: he added the

epithet and her flight from England together and they made up, to his perception, one of the little magnified embroilments which do duty for the real in superficial lives. It was worse to provoke Julia than not, and Peter thought Nick's doing so not particularly characteristic of his versatility for good. He might wonder why she didn't marry the member for Harsh if the subject had come up; but he wondered still more why Nick didn't marry her. Julia said nothing, again, as if to give him a chance to make some inquiry which would save her from gushing; but as his idea appeared to be to change the subject, and as he changed it only by silence, she was reduced to resuming presently:

"I should have thought you would have come over to see your friend the actress."

"Which of my friends? I know so many actresses," Peter rejoined.

"The woman you inflicted on us in this place a year ago—the one who is in London now."

"Oh, Miriam Rooth! I should have liked to come over, but I've been tied fast. Have you seen her?"

"Yes, I've seen her."

"Do you like her?"

"Not at all."

"She has a lovely voice," Peter hazarded, after a moment.

"I don't know anything about her voice—I haven't heard it."

"But she doesn't act in pantomime, does she?"

"I don't know anything about her acting. I saw her in private—in Nick Dormer's studio."

"In Nick Dormer's studio? What was she doing there?"

"She was sprawling over the room and staring at me."

If Mrs. Dallow had wished to "draw" her brother it is probable that at this point she suspected she had succeeded, in spite of the care he took to divest his tone of everything like emotion in uttering the words: "Why, does he know her so well? I didn't know."

"She's sitting to him for her portrait; at least she was then."

"Oh, yes, I remember: I put him up to that. I'm greatly interested. Is the portrait good?"

"I haven't the least idea—I didn't look at it. I dare say it's clever," Julia added.

"How in the world does Nick find time to paint?"

"I don't know. That horrid man brought her."

"What horrid man?" Peter demanded.

"The one Nick thinks so clever—the vulgar little man who was at your place that day and tried to talk to me. I remember he abused theatrical people to me—as if I cared anything about them. But he has apparently something to do with this girl."

"Oh, I recollect him—I had a discussion with him," Peter said.

"How could you? I must go and dress," Julia went on.

"He *was* clever, remarkably. Miss Rooth and her mother were old friends of his, and he was the first person to speak of them to me."

"What a distinction! I thought him disgusting!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow, who was pressed for time and who had now got up.

“Oh, you’re severe,” said Peter ; but as they separated she had given him something to think of.

That Nick was painting a beautiful actress was no doubt in part at least the reason why he was provoking and why his most intimate female friend had come abroad. The fact did not render him provoking to Peter Sherringham : on the contrary Peter had been quite sincere when he qualified it as interesting. It became indeed on reflection so interesting that it had perhaps almost as much to do with Sherringham’s rush over to London as it had to do with Julia’s coming away. Reflection taught Peter further that the matter was altogether a delicate one, and suggested that it was odd he should be mixed up with it in fact, when, as Julia’s business, he had wished only to keep out of it. It was his own business a little too : there was somehow a still more pointed implication of that in his sister’s saying to him the next day that she wished immensely he would take a fancy to Biddy Dormer. She said more : she said there had been a time when she believed he *had* done so—believed too that the poor child herself had believed the same. Biddy was far away the nicest girl she knew—the dearest, sweetest, cleverest, *best*, and one of the prettiest creatures in England, which never spoiled anything. She would make as charming a wife as ever a man had, suited to any position, however high, and (Julia didn’t mind mentioning it, since Peter would believe it whether she mentioned it or no) was so predisposed in his favour that he would have no trouble at all. In short she herself would see him through—she would answer for it that he would only have to speak. Biddy’s life at home was

horrid ; she was very sorry for her—the child was worthy of a better fate. Peter wondered what constituted the horridness of Biddy's life, and perceived that it mainly arose from the fact that Julia disliked Lady Agnes and Grace ; profiting comfortably by the freedom to do so conferred upon her by her having given them a house of which she had perhaps not felt the want till they were in possession of it. He knew she had always liked Biddy, but he asked himself (this was the rest of his wonder) why she had taken to liking her so extraordinarily just now. He liked her himself—he even liked to be talked to about her and he could believe everything Julia said : the only thing that mystified him was her motive for suddenly saying it. He assured her that he was infinitely indebted to her for her expenditure of imagination on his behalf, but that he was sorry if he had put it into any one's head (most of all into the girl's own) that he had looked at Biddy with a covetous eye. He knew not whether she would make a good wife, but he liked her quite too much to wish to put such a ticklish matter to the test. She was surely not intended for cruel experiments. As it happened he was not thinking of marrying any one—he had ever so many reasons against it. Of course one was never safe against accidents, but one could at least take precautions, and he didn't mind telling her that there were several he *had* taken.

“I don't know what you mean, but it seems to me quite the best precaution would be to care for a charming, steady girl like Biddy,” Mrs. Dallow replied. “Then you would be quite in shelter, you would know the worst that can happen to you, and it wouldn't be bad.” The objection Peter had

made to this argument is not important, especially as it was not remarkably candid; it need only be mentioned that before he and Julia parted she said to him, still in reference to Bridget Dormer: "Do go and see her and be nice to her: she'll save you disappointments."

These last words reverberated in Sherringham's mind; there was a shade of the portentous in them and they seemed to proceed from a larger knowledge of the subject than he himself as yet possessed. They were not absent from his memory when, in the beginning of May, availing himself, to save time, of the night-service, he crossed from Paris to London. He arrived before the breakfast-hour and went to his sister's house in Great Stanhope Street, where he always found quarters whether she were in town or not. If she were at home she welcomed him, and if she were not the relaxed servants hailed him for the chance he gave them to recover their "form." In either case his allowance of space was large and his independence complete. He had obtained permission this year to take in fractions instead of as a single draught the leave of absence to which he was entitled; and there was moreover a question of his being transferred to another Embassy, in which event he believed that he might count upon a month or two in England before proceeding to his new post.

He waited after breakfast but a very few minutes before jumping into a hansom and rattling away to the north. A part of his waiting indeed consisted of a fidgety walk up Bond Street, during which he looked at his watch three or four times while he paused at shop-windows for fear of being a

little early. In the cab, as he rolled along, after having given an address—Balaklava Place, St. John's Wood—the fear that he should be too early took curiously at moments the form of a fear that he should be too late: a symbol of the inconsistencies of which his spirit at present was full. Peter Sherringham was nervous, too nervous for a diplomatist, and haunted with inclinations, and indeed with purposes, which contradicted each other. He wanted to be out of it and yet he dreaded not to be in it, and on this particular occasion the sense of exclusion made him sore. At the same time he was not unconscious of the impulse to stop his cab and make it turn round and drive due south. He saw himself launched in the breezy fact while, morally speaking, he was hauled up on the hot sand of the principle, and he had the intelligence to perceive how little these two faces of the same idea had in common. However, as the sense of movement encouraged him to reflect, a principle was a poor affair if it remained mere inaction. Yet from the moment it turned to action it manifestly could only be the particular action in which he was engaged; so that he was in the absurd position of thinking his behaviour more consummate for the reason that it was directly opposed to his intentions.

He had kept away from London ever since Miriam Rooth came over; resisting curiosity, sympathy, importunate haunting passion and considering that his resistance, founded, to be salutary, on a general scheme of life, was the greatest success he had yet achieved. He was deeply occupied with plucking up the feeling that attached him to her, and he had already, by various little ingenuities, loosened some of its roots. He

suffered her to make her first appearance on any stage without the comfort of his voice or the applause of his hand ; saying to himself that the man who could do the more could do the less and that such an act of fortitude was a proof he should keep straight. It was not exactly keeping straight to run over to London three months later and, the hour he arrived, scramble off to Balaklava Place ; but after all he pretended only to be human and aimed in behaviour only at the heroic, not at the monstrous. The highest heroism was three parts tact. He had not written to Miriam that he was coming to England and would call upon her at eleven o'clock in the morning, because it was his secret pride that he had ceased to correspond with her. Sherringham took his prudence where he could find it, and in doing so was rather like a drunkard who should flatter himself that he had forsworn liquor because he didn't touch lemonade.

It is an example of how much he was drawn in different directions at once that when, on reaching Balaklava Place and alighting at the door of a small much-ivied house which resembled a gate-lodge bereft of its park, he learned that Miss Rooth had only a quarter of an hour before quitted the spot with her mother (they had gone to the theatre, to rehearsal, said the maid who answered the bell he had set tinkling behind a dingy plastered wall): when at the end of his pilgrimage he was greeted by a disappointment he suddenly found himself relieved and for the moment even saved. Providence was after all taking care of him and he submitted to Providence. He would still be watched over doubtless, even if he should follow the two ladies to the theatre, send in

his card and obtain admission to the histrionic workshop. All his old technical interest in the girl's development flamed up again, and he wondered what she was rehearsing, what she was to do next. He got back into his hansom and drove down the Edgware Road. By the time he reached the Marble Arch he had changed his mind again—he had determined to let Miriam alone for that day. The day would be over at eight o'clock in the evening (he hardly played fair), and then he should consider himself free. Instead of going to the theatre he drove to a shop in Bond Street, to take a place for the play. On first coming out he had tried, at one of those establishments strangely denominated "libraries," to get a stall, but the people to whom he applied were unable to accommodate him—they had not a single seat left. His second attempt, at another "library," was more successful: he was unable to obtain a stall, but by a miracle he might have a box. There was a certain wantonness in paying for a box to see a play on which he had already expended four hundred pounds; but while he was mentally measuring this abyss an idea came into his head which flushed the extravagance with a slight rose-tint.

Peter came out of the shop with the voucher for the box in his pocket, turned into Piccadilly, noted that the day was growing warm and fine, felt glad that this time he had no business, unless it were business to leave a card or two on official people, and asked himself where he should go if he didn't go after Miriam. Then it was that it struck him as most acutely desirable, and even most important, that he should see Nick Dormer's portrait of her. He wondered which

would be the natural place at that hour of the day to look for the artist. The House of Commons was perhaps the nearest one, but Nick, incongruous as his proceedings certainly were, probably didn't keep the picture there; and moreover it was not generally characteristic of him to be in the natural place. The end of Peter's debate was that he again entered a hansom and drove to Calcutta Gardens. The hour was early for calling, but cousins with whom one's intercourse was mainly a conversational scuffle would accept it as a practical illustration of that method. And if Julia wanted him to be nice to Biddy (which was exactly, though with a different view, what he wanted himself), what could be nicer than to pay his visit to Lady Agnes (he would have in decency to go to see her some time) at a friendly, fraternizing hour, when they would all be likely to be at home?

Unfortunately, as it turned out, they were not at home, so that Peter had to fall back on neutrality and the butler, who was however, more luckily, an old friend. Her ladyship and Miss Dormer were absent from town, paying a visit; and Mr. Dormer was also away, or was on the point of going away for the day. Miss Bridget was in London, but was out: Peter's informant mentioned with earnest vagueness that he thought she had gone somewhere to take a lesson. On Peter's asking what sort of a lesson he meant, he replied, "Oh, I think the a-sculpture, you know, sir." Peter knew, but Biddy's lesson in a-sculpture (it sounded on the butler's lips like a fashionable new art) struck him a little as a mockery of the benevolent spirit in which he had come to look her up. The man had an air of participating respectfully in his

disappointment and, to make up for it, added that he might perhaps find Mr. Dormer at his other address. He had gone out early and had directed his servant to come to Rosedale Road in an hour or two with a portmanteau: he was going down to Beauclere in the course of the day, Mr. Carteret being ill—perhaps Mr. Sherringham didn't know it. Perhaps too Mr. Sherringham would catch him in Rosedale Road before he took his train—he was to have been busy there for an hour. This was worth trying, and Peter immediately drove to Rosedale Road; where, in answer to his ring, the door was opened to him by Biddy Dormer.

XV.

WHEN Bidly saw him her cheek exhibited the prettiest pleased, surprised red that he had ever observed there, though he was not unacquainted with its fluctuations, and she stood still, smiling at him with the outer dazzle in her eyes, making no motion for him to enter. She only said: "Oh, Peter!" And then: "I'm all alone."

"So much the better, dear Bidly. Is that any reason I shouldn't come in?"

"Dear, no—do come in. You've just missed Nick; he has gone to the country—half an hour ago." She had on a large apron, and in her hand she carried a small stick, besmeared, as his quick eye saw, with modelling-clay. She dropped the door and fled back before him into the studio, where, when he followed her, she was in the act of flinging a cloth over a rough head, in clay, which, in the middle of the room, was supported on a high wooden stand. The effort to hide what she had been doing before he caught a glimpse of it made her redder still and led to her smiling more, to her laughing with a charming confusion of shyness and gladness. She rubbed her hands on her apron, she pulled it off, she looked delightfully awkward, not meeting Peter's eye, and she said: "I'm just scraping here a little—you mustn't mind

me. What I do is awful, you know. Peter, please don't look. I've been coming here lately to make my little mess, because mamma doesn't particularly like it at home. I've had a lesson from a lady who exhibits; but you wouldn't suppose it, to see what I do. Nick's so kind; he lets me come here; he uses the studio so little; I do what I please. What a pity he's gone—he would have been so glad. I'm really alone—I hope you don't mind. Peter, *please* don't look."

Peter was not bent upon looking; his eyes had occupation enough in Biddy's own agreeable aspect, which was full of an unusual element of domestication and responsibility. Though she had taken possession, by exception, of her brother's quarters, she struck her visitor as more at home and more herself than he had ever seen her. It was the first time she had been to his vision so separate from her mother and sister. She seemed to know this herself and to be a little frightened by it—just enough to make him wish to be reassuring. At the same time Peter also on this occasion found himself touched with diffidence, especially after he had gone back and closed the door and settled down to a regular visit; for he became acutely conscious of what Julia had said to him in Paris and was unable to rid himself of the suspicion that it had been said with Biddy's knowledge. It was not that he supposed his sister had told the girl that she meant to do what she could to make him propose to her: that would have been cruel to her (if she liked him enough to consent), in Julia's uncertainty. But Biddy participated by imagination, by divination, by a clever girl's secret tremulous intincts, in her good friend's views about her, and this probability consti-

tuted for Sherringham a sort of embarrassing publicity. He had impressions, possibly gross and unjust, in regard to the way women move constantly together amid such considerations and subtly intercommunicate, when they do not still more subtly dissemble, the hopes or fears of which persons of the opposite sex form the subject. Therefore poor Biddy would know that if she failed to strike him in the right light it would not be for want of his attention's having been called to her claims. She would have been tacitly rejected, virtually condemned. Peter could not, without a slight sense of fatuity, endeavour to make up for this to her by kindness; he was aware that if any one knew it a man would be ridiculous who should take so much as that for granted. But no one would know it: oddly enough, in this calculation of security he left Biddy herself out. It did not occur to him that she might have a secret small irony to spare for his ingenious and magnanimous impulse to show her how much he liked her in order to make her forgive him for not liking her more. This magnanimity at any rate coloured the whole of Sherringham's visit to Rosedale Road, the whole of the pleasant, prolonged chat that kept him there for more than an hour. He begged the girl to go on with her work and not to let him interrupt it; and she obliged him at last, taking the cloth off the lump of clay and giving him a chance to be delightful by guessing that the shapeless mass was intended, or would be intended after a while, for Nick. He saw that she was more comfortable when she began to smooth it and scrape it with her little stick again, to manipulate it with an ineffectual air of knowing how; for this gave her something to do, relieved her nervousness

and permitted her to turn away from him when she talked.

Peter walked about the room and sat down ; got up and looked at Nick's things ; watched her at moments in silence (which made her always say in a minute that he was not to look at her so or she could do nothing) ; observed how her position, before her high stand, her lifted arms, her turns of the head, considering her work this way and that, all helped her to be pretty. She repeated again and again that it was an immense pity about Nick, till he was obliged to say he didn't care a straw for Nick : he was perfectly content with the company he found. This was not the sort of thing he thought it right, under the circumstances, to say ; but then even the circumstances did not require him to pretend he liked her less than he did. After all she was his cousin ; she would cease to be so if she should become his wife ; but one advantage of her not entering into that relation was precisely that she would remain his cousin. It was very pleasant to find a young, bright, slim, rose-coloured kinswoman all ready to recognize consanguinity when one came back from cousinless foreign lands. Peter talked about family matters ; he didn't know, in his exile, where no one took an interest in them, what a fund of latent curiosity about them was in him. It was in him to gossip about them and to enjoy the sense that he and Biddy had indefeasible properties in common—ever so many things as to which they would understand each other *à demi-mot*. He smoked a cigarette, because she begged him to, said that people always smoked in studios—it made her feel so much more like an artist. She apologized for the badness of

her work on the ground that Nick was so busy he could scarcely ever give her a sitting; so that she had to do the head from photographs and occasional glimpses. They had hoped to be able to put in an hour that morning, but news had suddenly come that Mr. Carteret was worse, and Nick had hurried down to Beauclere. Mr. Carteret was very ill, poor old dear, and Nick and he were immense friends. Nick had always been charming to him. Peter and Biddy took the concerns of the houses of Dormer and Sherringham in order, and the young man felt after a little as if they were as wise as a French *conseil de famille*, settling what was best for every one. He heard all about Lady Agnes and manifested an interest in the detail of her existence that he had not supposed himself to possess, though indeed Biddy threw out intimations which excited his curiosity, presenting her mother in a light that might call upon his sympathy.

"I don't think she has been very happy or very pleased, of late," the girl said. "I think she has had some disappointments, poor dear mamma; and Grace has made her go out of town for three or four days, for a little change. They have gone down to see an old lady, Lady St. Dunstons, who never comes to London now, and who, you know—she's tremendously old—was papa's godmother. It's not very lively for Grace, but Grace is such a dear she'll do anything for mamma. Mamma will go anywhere to see people she can talk with about papa."

Biddy added, in reply to a further inquiry from Peter, that what her mother was disappointed about was—well, themselves, her children and all their affairs; and she explained that Lady Agnes wanted all kinds of things for them that

didn't come to them, that they didn't get or seem likely to get, so that their life appeared altogether a failure. She wanted a great deal, Biddy admitted; she really wanted everything and she had thought in her happier days that everything was to be hers. She loved them all so much, and then she was proud: she couldn't get over the thought of their not being successful. Sherringham was unwilling to press, at this point, for he suspected one of the things that Lady Agnes wanted; but Biddy relieved him a little by saying that one of these things was that Grace should get married.

"That's too unselfish of her," rejoined Peter, who didn't care for Grace. "Cousin Agnes ought to keep her near her always, if Grace is so obliging and devoted."

"Oh, mamma would give up anything of that sort for our good; she wouldn't sacrifice us that way!" Biddy exclaimed. "Besides, I'm the one to stay with mamma; not that I can manage and look after her and do everything so well as Grace. But, you know, I want to," said Biddy, with a liquid note in her voice, giving her lump of clay a little stab.

"But doesn't your mother want the rest of you to get married—Percival and Nick and you?" Peter asked.

"Oh, she has given up Percy. I don't suppose she thinks it would do. Dear Nick, of course—that's just what she does want."

Sherringham hesitated. "And you, Biddy?"

"Oh, I dare say; but that doesn't signify—I never shall."

Peter got up, at this; the tone of it set him in motion and he took a turn round the room. He said something to her

about her being too proud ; to which she replied that that was the only thing for a girl to be, to get on.

"What do you mean by getting on?" Peter demanded, stopping, with his hands in his pockets, on the other side of the studio.

"I mean crying one's eyes out!" Biddy unexpectedly exclaimed ; but she drowned the effect of this pathetic paradox in a foolish laugh and in the quick declaration : "Of course it's about Nick that poor mother's really broken-hearted."

"What's the matter with Nick?" Sherringham asked, diplomatically.

"Oh, Peter, what's the matter with Julia?" Biddy quavered softly, back to him, with eyes suddenly frank and mournful. "I dare say you know what we all hoped—what we all supposed, from what they told us. And now they won't!" said Biddy.

"Yes, Biddy, I know. I had the brightest prospect of becoming your brother-in-law : wouldn't that have been it—or something like that? But it is indeed visibly clouded. What's the matter with them? May I have another cigarette?" Peter came back to the wide, cushioned bench where he had been lounging : this was the way they took up the subject he wanted most to look into. "Don't they know how to love?" he went on, as he seated himself again.

"It seems a kind of fatality!" sighed Biddy.

Peter said nothing for some moments, at the end of which he inquired whether his companion were to be quite alone during her mother's absence. She replied that her mother was very droll about that—she would never leave her alone : she thought something dreadful would happen to her. She

had therefore arranged that Florence Tressilian should come and stay in Calcutta Gardens for the next few days, to look after her and see she did no wrong. Peter asked who Florence Tressilian might be : he greatly hoped, for the success of Lady Agnes's precautions, that she was not a flighty young genius like Biddy. She was described to him as tremendously nice and tremendously clever, but also tremendously old and tremendously safe ; with the addition that Biddy was tremendously fond of her and that while she remained in Calcutta Gardens they expected to enjoy themselves tremendously. She was to come that afternoon, before dinner.

"And are you to dine at home?" said Peter.

"Certainly ; where else?"

"And just you two, alone? Do you call that enjoying yourselves tremendously?"

"It will do for me. No doubt I oughtn't, in modesty, to speak for poor Florence."

"It isn't fair to her ; you ought to invite some one to meet her."

"Do you mean you, Peter?" the girl asked, turning to him quickly, with a look that vanished the instant he caught it.

"Try me ; I'll come like a shot."

"That's kind," said Biddy, dropping her hands and now resting her eyes on him gratefully. She remained in this position a moment, as if she were under a charm ; then she jerked herself back to her work with the remark : "Florence will like that immensely."

"I'm delighted to please Florence, your description of her is so attractive!" Sherringham laughed. And when the girl

asked him if he minded if there were not a great feast, because when her mother went away she allowed her a fixed amount for that sort of thing and, as he might imagine, it wasn't millions—when Biddy, with the frankness of their pleasant kinship, touched anxiously on this economical point (illustrating, as Peter saw, the lucidity with which Lady Agnes had had in her old age to learn to recognize the occasions when she could be conveniently frugal), he answered that the shortest dinners were the best, especially when one was going to the theatre. That was his case to-night, and did Biddy think he might look to Miss Tressilian to go with him? They would have to dine early; he wanted not to miss a moment.

"The theatre—Miss Tressilian?" Biddy stared, interrupted and in suspense again.

"Would it incommode you very much to dine say at 7.15 and accept a place in my box? The finger of Providence was in it when I took a box an hour ago. I particularly like your being free to go—if you are free."

Biddy became fairly incoherent with pleasure. "Dear Peter, how good you are! They'll have it at any hour. Florence will be so glad."

"And has Florence seen Miss Rooth?"

"Miss Rooth?" the girl repeated, redder than before. He perceived in a moment that she had heard that he had devoted much time and attention to that young lady. It was as if she were conscious that he would be conscious in speaking of her, and there was a sweetness in her allowance for him on that score. But Biddy was more confused for him than he was for himself. He guessed in a moment how much she had thought

over what she had heard; this was indicated by her saying vaguely: "No, no, I've not seen her." Then she became aware that she was answering a question he had not asked her, and she went on: "We shall be too delighted. I saw her—perhaps you remember—in your rooms in Paris. I thought her so wonderful then! Every one is talking of her here. But we don't go to the theatre much, you know: we don't have boxes offered us except when *you* come. Poor Nick is too much taken up in the evening. I've wanted awfully to see her. They say she's magnificent."

"I don't know," said Peter. "I haven't seen her."

"You haven't seen her?"

"Never, Biddy. I mean on the stage. In private, often—yes," Sherringham added, conscientiously.

"Oh!" Biddy exclaimed, bending her face on Nick's bust again. She asked him no question about the new star, and he offered her no further information. There were things in his mind that pulled him different ways, so that for some minutes silence was the result of the conflict. At last he said, after an hesitation caused by the possibility that she was ignorant of the fact he had lately elicited from Julia, though it was more probable she might have learned it from the same source:

"Am I perhaps indiscreet in alluding to the circumstance that Nick has been painting Miss Rooth's portrait?"

"You are not indiscreet in alluding to it to me, because I know it."

"Then there's no secret nor mystery about it?"

Biddy considered a moment. "I don't think mamma knows it."

"You mean you have been keeping it from her because she wouldn't like it?"

"We're afraid she may think that papa wouldn't have liked it."

This was said with an absence of humour which for an instant moved Sherringham to mirth; but he quickly recovered himself, repenting of any apparent failure of respect to the high memory of his late celebrated relative. He rejoined quickly, but rather vaguely: "Ah, yes, I remember that great man's ideas;" and then he went on: "May I ask if you know it, the fact that we are talking of, through Julia or through Nick?"

"I know it from both of them."

"Then, if you're in their confidence, may I further ask whether this undertaking of Nick's is the reason why things seem to be at an end between them?"

"Oh, I don't think she likes it," returned Biddy.

"Isn't it good?"

"Oh, I don't mean the picture—she hasn't seen it; but his having done it."

"Does she dislike it so much that that's why she won't marry him?"

Biddy gave up her work, moving away from it to look at it. She came and sat down on the long bench on which Sherringham had placed himself. Then she broke out: "Oh, Peter, it's a great trouble—it's a very great trouble; and I can't tell you, for I don't understand it."

"If I ask you, it's not to pry into what doesn't concern me; but Julia is my sister, and I can't, after all, help taking some

interest in her life. But she tells me very little. She doesn't think me worthy."

"Ah, poor Julia!" Biddy murmured, defensively. Her tone recalled to him that Julia had thought him worthy to unite himself to Bridget Dormer, and inevitably betrayed that the girl was thinking of that also. While they both thought of it they sat looking into each other's eyes.

"Nick, I'm sure, doesn't treat *you* that way. I'm sure he confides in you; he talks to you about his occupations, his ambitions," Peter continued. "And you understand him, you enter into them, you are nice to him, you help him."

"Oh, Nick's life—it's very dear to me," said Biddy.

"That must be jolly for him."

"It makes *me* very happy."

Peter uttered a low, ambiguous groan; then he exclaimed, with irritation: "What the deuce is the matter with them then? Why can't they hit it off and be quiet and rational and do what every one wants them to do?"

"Oh, Peter, it's awfully complicated," said Biddy, with sagacity.

"Do you mean that Nick's in love with her?"

"In love with Julia?"

"No, no, with Miriam Rooth."

Biddy shook her head slowly; then with a smile which struck him as one of the sweetest things he had ever seen (it conveyed, at the expense of her own prospects, such a shy, generous little mercy of reassurance): "He isn't, Peter," she declared. "Julia thinks it's trifling—all that sort of thing," she added. "She wants him to go in for different honours."

“Julia’s the oddest woman. I thought she loved him,” Sherringham remarked. “And when you love a person—” He continued to reflect, leaving his sentence impatiently unfinished, while Biddy, with lowered eyes, sat waiting (it interested her) to learn what you did when you loved a person. “I can’t conceive her giving him up. He has great ability, besides being such a good fellow.”

“It’s for his happiness, Peter—that’s the way she reasons,” Biddy explained. “She does it for an idea; she has told me a great deal about it, and I see the way she feels.”

“You try to, Biddy, because you are ‘such a dear good-natured girl, but I don’t believe you do in the least. It’s too little the way you yourself would feel. Julia’s idea, as you call it, must be curious.”

“Well, it is, Peter,” Biddy mournfully admitted. “She won’t risk not coming out at the top.”

“At the top of what?”

“Oh, of everything.” Biddy’s tone showed a trace of awe of such high views.

“Surely one’s at the top of everything when one’s in love.”

“I don’t know,” said the girl.

“Do you doubt it?” Sherringham demanded.

“I’ve never been in love and I never shall be.”

“You’re as perverse in your way as Julia. But I confess I don’t understand Nick’s attitude any better. He seems to me, if I may say so, neither fish nor flesh.”

“Oh, his attitude is very noble, Peter; his state of mind is wonderfully interesting,” Biddy pleaded. “Surely *you* must be in favour of art,” she said.

Sherringham looked at her a moment. "Dear Biddy, your little digs are as soft as zephyrs."

She coloured, but she protested. "My little digs? What do you mean? Are you not in favour of art?"

"The question is delightfully simple. I don't know what you're talking about. Everything has its place. A parliamentary life scarcely seems to me the situation for portrait-painting."

"That's just what Nick says."

"You talk of it together a great deal?"

"Yes, Nick's very good to me."

"Clever Nick! And what do you advise him?"

"Oh, to *do* something."

"That's valuable," Peter laughed. "Not to give up his sweetheart for the sake of a paint-pot, I hope?"

"Never, never, Peter! It's not a question of his giving up, for Julia has herself drawn back. I think she never really felt safe; she loved him, but she was afraid of him. Now she's only afraid—she has lost the confidence she tried to have. Nick has tried to hold her, but she has jerked herself away. Do you know what she said to me? She said: 'My confidence has gone forever.'"

"I didn't know she was such a prig!" Sherringham exclaimed. "They're queer people, verily, with water in their veins instead of blood. You and I wouldn't be like that, should we? though you *have* taken up such a discouraging position about caring for a fellow."

"I care for art," poor Biddy returned.

"You do, to some purpose," said Peter, glancing at the bust.

"To that of making you laugh at me."

"Would you give a good man up for that?"

"A good man? What man?"

"Well, say me—if I wanted to marry you."

Biddy hesitated a little. "Of course I would, in a moment. At any rate, I'd give up the House of Commons. That's what Nick's going to do now—only you mustn't tell any one."

Sherringham stared. "He's going to chuck up his seat?"

"I think his mind is made up to it. He has talked me over—we have had some deep discussions. Yes, I'm on the side of art!" said Biddy, ardently.

"Do you mean in order to paint—to paint Miss Rooth?" Peter went on.

"To paint every one—that's what he wants. By keeping his seat he hasn't kept Julia, and she was the thing he cared most for, in public life. When he has got out of the whole thing his attitude, as he says, will be at least clear. He's tremendously interesting about it, Peter; he has talked to me wonderfully; he *has* won me over. Mamma's heart-broken; telling her will be the hardest part."

"If she doesn't know, why is she heart-broken?"

"Oh, at the marriage not coming off—she knows that. That's what she wanted. She thought it perfection. She blames Nick fearfully. She thinks he held the whole thing in his hand and that he has thrown away a magnificent opportunity."

"And what does Nick say to her?"

"He says, 'Dear old mummy!'"

"That's good," said Sherringham.

"I don't know what will become of her when this other blow arrives," Biddy pursued. "Poor Nick wants to please her—he does, he does. But, as he says, you can't please every one, and you must, before you die, please yourself a little."

Peter Sherringham sat looking at the floor; the colour had risen to his face while he listened to the girl. Then he sprang up and took another turn about the room. His companion's artless but vivid recital had set his blood in motion. He had taken Nick Dormer's political prospects very much for granted, thought of them as definite and brilliant and seductive. To learn there was something for which he was ready to renounce such honours, and to recognize the nature of that bribe, affected Sherringham powerfully and strangely. He felt as if he had heard the sudden blare of a trumpet, and he felt at the same time as if he had received a sudden slap in the face. Nick's bribe was "art"—the strange temptress with whom he himself had been wrestling and over whom he had finally ventured to believe that wisdom and training had won a victory. There was something in the conduct of his old friend and playfellow that made all his reasonings small. Nick's unexpected choice acted on him as a reproach and a challenge. He felt ashamed at having placed himself so unromantically on his guard, rapidly saying to himself that if Nick could afford to allow so much for "art" he might surely exhibit some of the same confidence. There had never been the least avowed competition between the cousins—their lines lay too far apart for that; but nevertheless they rode in sight of each other, and Sherringham had at present the sensation of suddenly

seeing Nick Dormer give his horse the spur, bound forward and fly over a wall. He was put on his mettle and he had not to look long to spy an obstacle that he too might ride at. High rose his curiosity to see what warrant his kinsman might have for such risks—how he was mounted for such exploits. He really knew little about Nick's talent—so little as to feel no right to exclaim "What an ass!" when Biddy gave him the news which only the existence of real talent could redeem from absurdity. All his eagerness to ascertain what Nick had been able to make of such a subject as Miriam Rooth came back to him; though it was what mainly had brought him to Rosedale Road he had forgotten it in the happy accident of his encounter with Biddy. He was conscious that if the surprise of a revelation of power were in store for him Nick would be justified more than he himself would feel reinstated in his self-respect. For the courage of renouncing the forum for the studio hovered before him as greater than the courage of marrying an actress whom one was in love with: the reward in the latter case was so much more immediate. Peter asked Biddy what Nick had done with his portrait of Miriam. He hadn't seen it anywhere in rummaging about the room.

"I think it's here somewhere, but I don't know," Biddy replied, getting up and looking vaguely round her.

"Haven't you seen it? Hasn't he shown it to you?"

The girl rested her eyes on him strangely a moment; then she turned them away from him with a mechanical air of seeking for the picture. "I think it's in the room, put away with its face to the wall."

"One of those dozen canvases with their backs to us?"

"One of those perhaps."

"Haven't you tried to see?"

"I haven't touched them," said Biddy, colouring.

"Hasn't Nick had it out to show you?"

"He says it's in too bad a state—it isn't finished—it won't do."

"And haven't you had the curiosity to turn it round for yourself?"

The embarrassed look in poor Biddy's face deepened, and it seemed to Sherringham that her eyes pleaded with him a moment, that there was a menace of tears in them, a gleam of anguish. "I've had an idea he wouldn't like it."

Her visitor's own desire however had become too lively for easy forbearance. He laid his hand on two or three canvases which proved, as he extricated them, to be either blank or covered with rudimentary forms. "Dear Biddy, are you as docile, as obliging as that?" he asked, pulling out something else.

The inquiry was meant in familiar kindness, for Peter was struck, even to admiration, with the girl's having a sense of honour which all girls have not. She must in this particular case have longed for a sight of Nick's work—the work which had brought about such a crisis in his life. But she had passed hours in his studio alone, without permitting herself a stolen peep; she was capable of that if she believed it would please him. Sherringham liked a charming girl's being capable of that (he had known charming girls who would not have been), and his question was really an expression of respect. Biddy,

however, apparently discovered some light mockery in it, and she broke out incongruously :

“ I haven’t wanted so much to see it. I don’t care for her so much as that.”

“ So much as that ? ”

“ I don’t care for his actress—for that vulgar creature. I don’t like her ! ” said Biddy, unexpectedly.

Peter stared. “ I thought you hadn’t seen her.”

“ I saw her in Paris—twice. She was wonderfully clever, but she didn’t charm me.”

Sherringham quickly considered, and then he said benevolently : “ I won’t inflict the picture upon you then ; we’ll leave it alone for the present.” Biddy made no reply to this at first, but after a moment she went straight over to the row of stacked canvases and exposed several of them to the light. “ Why did you say you wished to go to the theatre to-night ? ” her companion continued.

Still the girl was silent ; then she exclaimed, with her back turned to him and a little tremor in her voice, while she drew forth one of her brother’s studies after the other : “ For the sake of your company, Peter ! Here it is, I think,” she added, moving a large canvas with some effort. “ No, no, I’ll hold it for you. Is that the light ? ”

She wouldn’t let him take it ; she bade him stand off and allow her to place it in the right position. In this position she carefully presented it, supporting it, at the proper angle, from behind and showing her head and shoulders above it. From the moment his eyes rested on the picture Sherringham accepted this service without protest. Unfinished, simplified and in

some portions merely suggested, it was strong, brilliant and vivid and had already the look of life and the air of an original thing. Sherringham was startled, he was strangely affected—he had no idea Nick moved with that stride. Miriam was represented in three-quarters, seated, almost down to her feet. She leaned forward, with one of her legs crossed over the other, her arms extended and foreshortened, her hands locked together round her knee. Her beautiful head was bent a little, broodingly, and her splendid face seemed to look down at life. She had a grand appearance of being raised aloft, with a wide regard, from a height of intelligence, for the great field of the artist, all the figures and passions he may represent. Peter wondered where his kinsman had learned to paint like that. He almost gasped at the composition of the thing, at the drawing of the moulded arms. Biddy Dormer abstained from looking round the corner of the canvas as she held it; she only watched, in Peter's eyes, for *his* impression of it. This she easily caught, and he could see that she had done so when after a few minutes he went to relieve her. She let him lift the thing out of her grasp; he moved it and rested it, so that they could still see it, against the high back of a chair.

“It's tremendously good,” he said.

“Dear, dear Nick,” Biddy murmured, looking at it now.

“Poor, poor Julia!” Sherringham was prompted to exclaim, in a different tone. His companion made no rejoinder to this, and they stood another minute or two side by side in silence, gazing at the portrait. Then Sherringham took up his hat—he had no more time, he must go. “Will you come to-night

all the same?" he asked, with a laugh that was somewhat awkward, putting out his hand to Biddy.

"All the same?"

"Why, you say she's a terrible creature," Peter went on with his eyes on the painted face.

"Oh, anything for art!" said Biddy, smiling.

"Well, at seven o'clock then." And Sherringham went away immediately, leaving the girl alone with the Tragic Muse and feeling again, with a quickened rush, a sense of the beauty of Miriam, as well as a new comprehension of the talent of Nick.

XVI.

IT was not till noon, or rather later, the next day, that Sherringham saw Miriam Rooth. He wrote her a note that evening, to be delivered to her at the theatre, and during the performance she sent round to him a card with "All right—come to luncheon to-morrow," scrawled upon it in pencil.

When he presented himself in Balaklava Place he learned that the two ladies had not come in—they had gone again, early, to rehearsal ; but they had left word that he was to be pleased to wait—they would come in from one moment to the other. It was further mentioned to him, as he was ushered into the drawing-room, that Mr. Dashwood was on the ground. This circumstance however Sherringham barely noted : he had been soaring so high for the past twelve hours that he had almost lost consciousness of the minor differences of earthly things. He had taken Biddy Dormer and her friend Miss Tressilian home from the play, and after leaving them he had walked about the streets, he had roamed back to his sister's house, in a state of exaltation intensified by the fact that all the evening he had contained himself, thinking it more decorous and considerate, less invidious not to "rave." Sitting there in the shade of the box with his companions, he had watched Miriam in attentive but inexpressive silence, glowing and

vibrating inwardly, but, for these fine, deep reasons, not committing himself to the spoken rapture. Delicacy, it appeared to him, should rule the hour; and indeed he had never had a pleasure more delicate than this little period of still observation and repressed ecstasy. Miriam's art lost nothing by it, and Biddy's mild nearness only gained. This young lady was silent also—wonderingly dauntedly, as if she too were conscious in relation to the actress of various other things beside her mastery of her art. To this mastery Biddy's attitude was a candid and liberal tribute: the poor girl sat quenched and pale, as if in the blinding light of a comparison by which it would be presumptuous even to be annihilated. Her subjection however was a gratified, a charmed subjection: there was a beneficence in such beauty—the beauty of the figure that moved before the footlights and spoke in music—even if it deprived one of hope. Peter didn't say to her, in vulgar elation and in reference to her whimsical profession of dislike at the studio: "Well, do you find this performer so disagreeable now?" and she was grateful to him for his forbearance, for the tacit kindness of which the idea seemed to be: "My poor child, I would prefer you if I could; but—judge for yourself—how can I? Expect of me only the possible. Expect that certainly, but only that." In the same degree Peter liked Biddy's sweet, hushed air of judging for herself, of recognizing his discretion and letting him off, while she was lost in the illusion, in the convincing picture of the stage. Miss Tressilian did most of the criticism: she broke out cheerfully and sonorously from time to time, in reference to the actress: "Most striking, certainly," or, "She *is* clever, isn't she?" It

was a manner to which her companions found it impossible to respond. Miss Tressilian was disappointed in nothing but their enjoyment : they didn't seem to think the exhibition as amusing as she.

Walking away through the ordered void of Lady Agnes's quarter, with the four acts of the play glowing again before him in the smokeless London night, Sherringham found the liveliest thing in his impression the certitude that if he had never seen Miriam before and she had had for him none of the advantages of association, he would still have recognized in her performance the most interesting thing that the theatre had ever offered him. He floated in a sense of the felicity of it, in the general encouragement of a thing perfectly done, in the almost aggressive bravery of still larger claims for an art which could so triumphantly, so exquisitely render life. "Render it?" Peter said to himself. "Create it and reveal it, rather ; give us something new and large and of the first order!" He had *seen* Miriam now ; he had never seen her before ; he had never seen her till he saw her in her conditions. Oh, her conditions—there were many things to be said about them ; they were paltry enough as yet, inferior, inadequate, obstructive, as compared with the right, full, finished setting of such a talent ; but the essence of them was now irremovably in Sherringham's eye, the vision of how the uplifted stage and the listening house transformed her. That idea of her having no character of her own came back to him with a force that made him laugh in the empty street : this was a disadvantage she was so exempt from that he appeared to himself not to have known her till to-night. Her character

was simply to hold you by the particular spell; any other—the good-nature of home, the relation to her mother, her friends, her lovers, her debts, the practice of virtues or industries or vices—was not worth speaking of. These things were the fictions and shadows; the representation was the deep substance.

Sherringham had, as he went, an intense vision (he had often had it before) of the conditions which were still absent, the great and complete ones, those which would give the girl's talent a superior, glorious stage. More than ever he desired them, mentally invoked them, filled them out in imagination, cheated himself with the idea that they were possible. He saw them in a momentary illusion and confusion: a great academic, artistic theatre, subsidized and unburdened with money-getting, rich in its repertory, rich in the high quality and the wide array of its servants, and above all in the authority of an impossible administrator—a manager personally disinterested, not an actor with an eye to the main chance, pouring forth a continuity of tradition, striving for perfection, laying a splendid literature under contribution. He saw the heroine of a hundred "situations," variously dramatic and vividly real; he saw comedy and drama and passion and character and English life; he saw all humanity and history and poetry, and perpetually, in the midst of them, shining out in the high relief of some great moment, an image as fresh as an unveiled statue. He was not unconscious that he was taking all sorts of impossibilities and miracles for granted; but it really seemed to him for the time that the woman he had been watching three hours, the incarnation of

the serious drama, would be a new and vivifying force. The world was just then so bright to him that Basil Dashwood struck him at first as an harmonious minister of that force.

It must be added that before Miriam arrived the breeze that filled Sherringham's sail began to sink a little. He passed out of the eminently "let" drawing-room, where twenty large photographs of the young actress bloomed in the desert; he went into the garden by a glass-door that stood open, and found Mr. Dashwood reclining on a bench and smoking cigarettes. This young man's conversation was a different music—it took him down, as he felt; showed him, very sensibly and intelligibly, it must be confessed, the actual theatre, the one they were all concerned with, the one they would have to make the miserable best of. It was fortunate for Sherringham that he kept his intoxication mainly to himself: the Englishman's habit of not being effusive still prevailed with him, even after his years of exposure to the foreign infection. Nothing could have been less exclamatory than the meeting of the two men, with its question or two, its remark or two about Sherringham's arrival in London; its offhand "I noticed you last night—I was glad you turned up at last," on one side, and its attenuated "Oh, yes, it was the first time—I was very much interested," on the other. Basil Dashwood played a part in "Yolande," and Sherringham had had the satisfaction of taking the measure of his aptitude. He judged it to be of the small order, as indeed the part, which was neither that of the virtuous nor that of the villainous hero, restricted him to two or three inconspicuous effects and three or four changes of dress. He represented

an ardent but respectful young lover whom the distracted heroine found time to pity a little and even to rail at; but it was impressed upon Sherringham that he scarcely represented young love. He looked very well, but Peter had heard him already in a hundred contemporary pieces; he never got out of rehearsal. He uttered sentiments and breathed vows with a nice voice, with a shy, boyish tremor in it, but as if he were afraid of being chaffed for it afterwards; giving the spectator in the stalls the feeling of holding the prompt-book and listening to a recitation. He made one think of country-houses and lawn-tennis and private theatricals; than which there could not be, to Sherringham's sense, an association more disconnected with the actor's art.

Dashwood knew all about the new thing, the piece in rehearsal; he knew all about everything—receipts and salaries and expenses and newspaper articles, and what old Baskerville said and what Mrs. Ruffler thought: matters of superficial concern to Sherringham, who wondered, before Miriam appeared, whether she talked with her "walking-gentleman" about them by the hour, deep in them and finding them not vulgar and boring, but the natural air of her life and the essence of her profession. Of course she did—she naturally would; it was all in the day's work and he might feel sure she wouldn't turn up her nose at the shop. He had to remind himself that he didn't care if she didn't—that he would think worse of her if she should. She certainly had much confabulation with her competent playfellow, talking shop by the hour: Sherringham could see that from the familiar, customary way Dashwood sat there with his cigarette, as if he were in

possession and on his own ground. He divined a great intimacy between the two young artists, but asked himself at the same time what he, Peter Sherringham, had to say about it. He didn't pretend to control Miriam's intimacies, it was to be supposed; and if he had encouraged her to adopt a profession which abounded in opportunities for comradeship it was not for him to cry out because she had taken to it kindly. He had already descried a fund of utility in Mrs. Lovick's light brother; but it irritated him all the same, after a while, to hear Basil Dashwood represent himself as almost indispensable. He was practical—there was no doubt of that; and this idea added to Sherringham's paradoxical sense that as regards the matters actually in question he himself had not this virtue. Dashwood had got Mrs. Rooth the house; it happened by a lucky chance that Laura Lumley, to whom it belonged (Sherringham would know Laura Lumley?) wanted to get rid, for a mere song, of the remainder of a lease. She was going to Australia with a troupe of her own. They just stepped into it; it was good air—the best sort of air to live in, to sleep in, in London, for people in their line. Sherringham wondered what Miriam's personal relations with this deucedly knowing gentleman might be, and was again able to assure himself that they might be anything in the world she liked, for any stake he, Peter, had in them. Dashwood told him of all the smart people who had tried to take up the new star—the way the London world had already held out its hand; and perhaps it was Sherringham's irritation, the crushed sentiment I just mentioned, that gave a little heave in the exclamation: "Oh, that—that's all rubbish; the

less of that the better!" At this Basil Dashwood stared; he evidently felt snubbed; he had expected his interlocutor to be pleased with the names of the eager ladies who had "called"—which proved to Sherringham that he took a low view of his art. The secretary of embassy explained, it is to be hoped not pedantically, that this art was serious work and that society was humbug and imbecility; also that of old the great comedians wouldn't have known such people. Garrick had essentially his own circle.

"No, I suppose they didn't call, in the old narrow-minded time," said Basil Dashwood.

"Your profession didn't call. They had better company—that of the romantic, gallant characters they represented. They lived with *them*, and it was better all round." And Peter asked himself—for the young man looked as if that struck him as a dreary period—if *he* only, for Miriam, in her new life, or among the futilities of those who tried to find her accessible, expressed the artistic idea. This at least, Sherringham reflected, was a situation that could be improved.

He learned from Dashwood that the new play, the thing they were rehearsing, was an old play, a romantic drama of thirty years before, covered, from infinite queer handling, with a sort of dirty glaze. Dashwood had a part in it, but there was an act in which he didn't appear, and that was the act they were doing that morning. "Yolande" had done all "Yolande" could do: Sherringham was mistaken if he supposed "Yolande" was such a tremendous hit. It had done very well, it had run three months, but they were by no means coining money with it. It wouldn't take them to the

end of the season ; they had seen for a month past that they would have to put on something else. Miss Rooth moreover wanted a new part ; she was impatient to show what a range she was capable of. She had grand ideas ; she thought herself very good-natured to repeat the same thing for three months. Basil Dashwood lighted another cigarette and described to his companion some of Miss Rooth's ideas. He gave Sherringham a great deal of information about her—about her character, her temper, her peculiarities, her little ways, her manner of producing some of her effects. He spoke with familiarity and confidence, as if he knew more about her than any one else—as if he had invented or discovered her, were in a sense her proprietor or guarantor. It was the talk of the shop, with a perceptible shrewdness in it and a touching young candour ; the expansiveness of the commercial spirit when it relaxes and generalizes, is conscious it is safe with another member of the guild.

Sherringham could not help protesting against the lame old war-horse whom it was proposed to bring into action, who had been ridden to death and had saved a thousand desperate fields ; and he exclaimed on the strange passion of the good British public for sitting again and again through expected situations, watching for speeches they had heard and surprises that struck the hour. Dashwood defended the taste of London, praised it as loyal, constant, faithful ; to which Sherringham retorted with some vivacity that it was faithful to rubbish. He justified this sally by declaring that the play in rehearsal *was* rubbish, clumsy mediocrity which had outlived its convenience, and that the fault was the want of life in the critical

sense of the public, which was ignobly docile, opening its mouth for its dose, like the pupils of Dotheboys Hall; not insisting on something different, on a fresh preparation. Dashwood asked him if he then wished Miss Rooth to go on playing for ever a part she had repeated more than eighty nights on end: he thought the modern "run" was just what he had heard him denounce, in Paris, as the disease the theatre was dying of. This imputation Sherringham gained; he wanted to know if she couldn't change to something less stale than the piece in question. Dashwood opined that Miss Rooth must have a strong part and that there happened to be one for her in the before-mentioned venerable novelty. She had to take what she could get; she wasn't a girl to cry for the moon. This was a stop-gap—she would try other things later; she would have to look round her: you couldn't have a new piece left at your door every day with the milk. On one point Sherringham's mind might be at rest: Miss Rooth was a woman who would do every blessed thing there was to do. Give her time and she would walk straight through the repertory. She was a woman who would do this—she was a woman who would do that: Basil Dashwood employed this phrase so often that Sherringham, nervous, got up and threw an unsmoked cigarette away. Of course she was a woman: there was no need of Dashwood's saying it a hundred times!

As for the repertory, the young man went on, the most beautiful girl in the world could give but what she had. He explained, after Sherringham sat down again, that the noise made by Miss Rooth was not exactly what this admirer appeared to suppose. Sherringham had seen the house the

night before ; would recognize that, though good, it was very far from great. She had done very well, very well indeed, but she had never gone above a point which Dashwood expressed in pounds sterling, to the edification of his companion, who vaguely thought the figure high. Sherringham remembered that he had been unable to get a stall, but Dashwood insisted that the girl had not leaped into commanding fame : that was a thing that never happened in fact—it happened only in pretentious works of fiction. She had attracted notice, unusual notice for a woman whose name the day before had never been heard of : she was recognized as having, for a novice, extraordinary cleverness and confidence—in addition to her looks of course, which were the thing that had really fetched the crowd. But she hadn't been the talk of London ; she had only been the talk of Gabriel Nash. He wasn't London, more was the pity. He knew the æsthetic people—the worldly, semi-smart ones, not the frumpy, sickly lot who wore dirty drapery ; and the æsthetic people had run after her. Basil Dashwood instructed Sherringham sketchily as to the different sects in the great religion of beauty, and was able to give him the particular “note” of the critical clique to which Miriam had begun so quickly to owe it that she had a vogue. The information made the secretary of embassy feel very ignorant of the world, very uninitiated and buried in his little professional hole. Dashwood warned him that it would be a long time before the general public would wake up to Miss Rooth, even after she had waked up to herself : she would have to do some really big thing first. *They* knew it was in her, the big thing—Sherringham and he,

and even poor Nash—because they had seen her as no one else had ; but London never took any one on trust—it had to be cash down. It would take their young lady two or three years to pay out her cash and get her equivalent. But of course the equivalent would be simply a gold-mine. Within its limits however, her success was already quite a fairy-tale : there was magic in the way she had concealed, from the first, her want of experience. She absolutely made you think she had a lot of it, more than any one else. Mr. Dashwood repeated several times that she was a cool hand—a deucedly cool hand ; and that he watched her himself, saw ideas come to her, saw her try different dodges on different nights. She was always alive—she liked it herself. She gave *him* ideas, long as he had been on the stage. Naturally she had a great deal to learn—a tremendous lot to learn : a cosmopolite like Sherringham would understand that a girl of that age, who had never had a friend but her mother—her mother was greater fun than ever now—naturally *would* have. Sherringham winced at being called a “cosmopolite” by his young companion, just as he had winced a moment before at hearing himself lumped, in esoteric knowledge, with Dashwood and Gabriel Nash ; but the former of these gentlemen took no account of his sensibility while he enumerated a few of the things that the young actress had to learn. Dashwood was a mixture of acuteness and innocent fatuity ; and Sherringham had to recognize that he had some of the elements of criticism in him when he said that the wonderful thing in the girl was that she learned so fast—learned something every night, learned from the same old piece a lot more than any one else

would have learned from twenty. "That's what it is to be a genius," Sherringham remarked. "Genius is only the art of getting your experience fast, of stealing it, as it were; and in this sense Miss Rooth's a regular brigand." Dashwood assented good-humouredly; then he added, "Oh, she'll do!" It was exactly in these simple words, in speaking to her, that Sherringham had phrased the same truth; yet he didn't enjoy hearing them on his neighbour's lips: they had a profane, patronizing sound, suggestive of displeasing equalities.

The two men sat in silence for some minutes, watching a fat robin hop about on the little seedy lawn; at the end of which they heard a vehicle stop on the other side of the garden wall and the voices of people descending from it. "Here they come, the dear creatures," said Basil Dashwood, without moving; and from where they sat Sherringham saw the small door in the wall pushed open. The dear creatures were three in number, for a gentleman had added himself to Mrs. Rooth and her daughter. As soon as Miriam's eyes fell upon her Parisian friend she stopped short, in a large, droll theatrical attitude, and, seizing her mother's arm, exclaimed passionately: "Look where he sits, the author of all my woes—cold, cynical, cruel!" She was evidently in the highest spirits; of which Mrs. Rooth partook as she cried indulgently, giving her a slap: "Oh, get along, you gipsy!"

"She's always up to something," Basil Dashwood commented, as Miriam, radiant and with a conscious stage tread, glided towards Sherringham as if she were coming to the footlights. He rose slowly from his seat, looking at her and

struck with her beauty ; he had been impatient to see her, yet in the act his impatience had had a disconcerting check.

Sherringham had had time to perceive that the man who had come in with her was Gabriel Nash, and this recognition brought a low sigh to his lips as he held out his hand to her—a sigh expressive of the sudden sense that his interest in her now could only be a gross community. Of course that didn't matter, since he had set it, at the most, such rigid limits ; but none the less he stood vividly reminded that it would be public and notorious, that inferior people would be inveterately mixed up with it, that she had crossed the line and sold herself to the vulgar, making him indeed only one of an equalized multitude. The way Gabriel Nash turned up there just when he didn't want to see him made Peter feel that it was a complicated thing to have a friendship with an actress so clearly destined to be famous. He quite forgot that Nash had known Miriam long before his own introduction to her and had been present at their first meeting, which he had in fact in a measure brought about. Had Sherringham not been so cut out to make trouble of this particular joy he might have found some adequate assurance that she distinguished him in the way in which, taking his hand in both of hers, she looked up at him and murmured, "Dear old master !" Then, as if this were not acknowledgment enough, she raised her head still higher and, whimsically, gratefully, charmingly, almost nobly, she kissed him on the lips, before the other men, before the good mother whose "Oh, you honest creature !" made everything regular.

XVII.

IF Peter Sherringham was ruffled by some of Miriam's circumstances there was comfort and consolation to be drawn from others, beside the essential fascination (there was no doubt about that now) of the young lady's own society. He spent the afternoon, they all spent the afternoon, and the occasion reminded him of a scene in "Wilhelm Meister." Mrs. Rooth had little resemblance to Mignon, but Miriam was remarkably like Philina. Luncheon was delayed two or three hours; but the long wait was a positive source of gaiety, for they all smoked cigarettes in the garden and Miriam gave striking illustrations of the parts she was studying. Sherringham was in the state of a man whose toothache has suddenly stopped—he was exhilarated by the cessation of pain. The pain had been the effort to remain in Paris after Miriam came to London, and the balm of seeing her now was the measure of the previous soreness.

Gabriel Nash had, as usual, plenty to say, and he talked of Nick Dormer's picture so long that Sherringham wondered whether he did it on purpose to vex him. They went in and out of the house; they made excursions to see how lunch was coming on; and Sherringham got half an hour alone, or virtually alone, with the object of his unsanctioned passion—

drawing her publicly away from the others and making her sit with him in the most sequestered part of the little gravelled grounds. There was summer enough in the trees to shut out the adjacent villas, and Basil Dashwood and Gabriel Nash lounged together at a convenient distance, while Nick's whimsical friend tried experiments upon the histrionic mind. Miriam confessed that, like all comedians, they ate at queer hours; she sent Dashwood in for biscuits and sherry—she proposed sending him round to the grocer's in the Circus Road for superior wine. Sherringham judged him to be the factotum of the little household: he knew where the biscuits were kept and the state of the grocer's account. When Peter congratulated the young actress on having so useful an associate she said genially, but as if the words disposed of him: "Oh, he's awfully handy!" To this she added: "You're not, you know;" resting the kindest, most pitying eyes on him. The sensation they gave him was as sweet as if she had stroked his cheek, and her manner was responsive even to tenderness. She called him "Dear master" again, and sometimes "Cher maître," and appeared to express gratitude and reverence by every intonation.

"You're doing the humble dependent now," he said: "you do it beautifully, as you do everything." She replied that she didn't make it humble enough—she couldn't; she was too proud, too insolent in her triumph. She liked that, the triumph, too much, and she didn't mind telling him that she was perfectly happy. Of course as yet the triumph was very limited; but success was success, whatever its quantity; the dish was a small one, but it had the right taste. Her imagination

had already bounded beyond the first phase, unexpectedly brilliant as this had been : her position struck her as modest compared with a future that was now vivid to her. Sherringham had never seen her so soft and sympathetic ; she had insisted, in Paris, that her personal character was that of the good girl (she used the term in a fine loose way), and it was impossible to be a better girl than she showed herself this pleasant afternoon. She was full of gossip and anecdote and drollery ; she had exactly the air that he would have liked her to have—that of thinking of no end of things to tell him. It was as if she had just returned from a long journey, had had strange adventures and made wonderful discoveries. She began to speak of this and that, and broke off to speak of something else ; she talked of the theatre, of the newspapers and then of London, of the people she had met and the extraordinary things they said to her, of the parts she was going to take up, of lots of new ideas that had come to her about the art of comedy. She wanted to do comedy now—to do the comedy of London life. She was delighted to find that seeing more of the world suggested things to her ; they came straight from the fact, from nature, if you could call it nature : so that she was convinced more than ever that the artist ought to *live*, to get on with his business, gather ideas, lights from experience—ought to welcome any experience that would give him lights. But work, of course, *was* experience, and everything in one's life that was good was work. That was the jolly thing in the actor's trade—it made up for other elements that were odious : if you only kept your eyes open nothing could happen to you that wouldn't be food for observation

and grist to your mill, showing you how people looked and moved and spoke—cried and grimaced, or writhed and dissimulated, in given situations. She saw all round her things she wanted to “do”—London was full of them, if you had eyes to see. Miriam demanded imperiously why people didn’t take them up, put them into plays and parts, give one a chance with them : she expressed her sharp impatience of the general literary stupidity. She had never been chary of this particular displeasure, and there were moments (it was an old story and a subject of frank raillery to Sherringham) when to hear her you might have thought there was no cleverness anywhere but in her disdainful mind. She wanted tremendous things done, that she might use them, but she didn’t pretend to say exactly what they were to be, nor even approximately how they were to be handled : her ground was rather that if *she* only had a pen—it was exasperating to have to explain ! She mainly contented herself with declaring that nothing had really been touched : she felt that more and more as she saw more of people’s goings-on.

Sherringham went to her theatre again that evening and he made no scruple of going every night for a week. Rather, perhaps I should say, he made a scruple ; but it was a part of the pleasure of his life during these arbitrary days to overcome it. The only way to prove to himself that he could overcome it was to go ; and he was satisfied, after he had been seven times, not only with the spectacle on the stage but with his own powers of demonstration. There was no satiety however with the spectacle on the stage, inasmuch as that only produced a further curiosity. Miriam’s performance was a living

thing, with a power to change, to grow, to develop, to beget new forms of the same life. Peter Sherringham contributed to it in his amateurish way, watching with solicitude the fate of his contributions. He talked it over in Balaklava Place, suggested modifications, variations worth trying. Miriam professed herself thankful for any refreshment that could be administered to her interest in "Yolande," and, with an effectiveness that showed large resource, touched up her part and drew several new airs from it. Sherringham's suggestions bore upon her way of uttering certain speeches, the intonations that would have more beauty or make the words mean more. Miriam had her ideas, or rather she had her instincts, which she defended and illustrated, with a vividness superior to argument, by a happy pictorial phrase or a snatch of mimicry ; but she was always for trying ; she liked experiments and caught at them, and she was especially thankful when some one gave her a showy reason, a plausible formula, in a case where she only stood upon an intuition. She pretended to despise reasons and to like and dislike at her sovereign pleasure ; but she always honoured the exotic gift, so that Sherringham was amused with the liberal way she produced it, as if she had been a naked islander rejoicing in a present of crimson cloth.

Day after day he spent most of his time in her society, and Miss Laura Lumley's recent habitation became the place in London to which his thoughts were most attached. He was highly conscious that he was not now carrying out that principle of abstention which he had brought to such maturity before leaving Paris ; but he contented himself with a much

cruder justification of this inconsequence than he would have thought adequate in advance. It consisted simply in the idea that to be identified with the first public steps of a young genius was a delightful experience. What was the harm of it, if the genius were real? Sherringham's main security was now that his relations with Miriam had been frankly placed under the protection of the idea of legitimate extravagance. In this department they made a very creditable figure and required much less watching and pruning than when it was his effort to fit them into a worldly plan. Sherringham had a sense of real wisdom when he said to himself that it surely should be enough that this momentary intellectual participation in the girl's dawning fame was a charming thing. Charming things, in a busy man's life, were not frequent enough to be kicked out of the way. Balaklava Place, looked at in this philosophic way, became almost idyllic: it gave Peter the pleasantest impression he had ever had of London.

The season happened to be remarkably fine; the temperature was high, but not so high as to keep people from the theatre. Miriam's "business" visibly increased, so that the question of putting on the second play underwent some reconsideration. The girl insisted, showing in her insistence a temper of which Sherringham had already caught some splendid gleams. It was very evident that through her career it would be her expectation to carry things with a high hand. Her managers and agents would not find her an easy victim or a calculable force: but the public would adore her, surround her with the popularity that attaches to a humorous, good-natured princess, and her comrades would have a kindness for her because she

wouldn't be selfish. They too would form in a manner a portion of her affectionate public. This was the way Sherringham read the signs, liking her whimsical tolerance of some of her vulgar playfellows almost well enough to forgive their presence in Balaklava Place, where they were a sore trial to her mother, who wanted her to multiply her points of contact only with the higher orders. There were hours when Sherringham thought he foresaw that her principal relation to the proper world would be to have, within two or three years, a grand battle with it, making it take her, if she let it have her at all, absolutely on her own terms: a picture which led our young man to ask himself, with a helplessness that was not exempt, as he perfectly knew, from absurdity, what part *he* should find himself playing in such a contest and if it would be reserved to him to be the more ridiculous as a peacemaker or as a heavy auxiliary.

"She might know any one she would, and the only person she appears to take any pleasure in is that dreadful Miss Rover," Mrs. Rooth whimpered, more than once, to Sherringham, who recognized in the young lady so designated the principal complication of Balaklava Place.

Miss Rover was a little actress who played at Miriam's theatre, combining with an unusual aptitude for delicate comedy a less exceptional absence of rigour in private life. She was pretty and quick and clever, and had a fineness that Miriam professed herself already in a position to estimate as rare. She had no control of her inclinations; yet sometimes they were wholly laudable, like the devotion she had formed for her beautiful colleague, whom she admired not only as an

ornament of the profession but as a being of a more fortunate essence. She had had an idea that real ladies were "nasty"; but Miriam was not nasty, and who could gainsay that Miriam was a real lady? The girl justified herself to Sherringham, who had found no fault with her; she knew how much her mother feared that the proper world wouldn't come in if they knew that the improper, in the person of pretty Miss Rover, was on the ground. What did she care who came and who didn't, and what was to be gained by receiving half the snobs in London? People would have to take her exactly as they found her—that they would have to learn; and they would be much mistaken if they thought her capable of becoming a snob too for the sake of their sweet company. She didn't pretend to be anything but what she meant to be, the best general actress of her time; and what had that to do with her seeing or not seeing a poor ignorant girl who had lov— Well, she needn't say what Fanny had. She had met her in the way of business—she didn't say she would have run after her. She had liked her because she wasn't a stick, and when Fanny Rover had asked her quite wistfully if she mightn't come and see her, she hadn't bristled with scandalized virtue. Miss Rover was not a bit more stupid or more ill-natured than any one else: it would be time enough to shut the door when she should become so.

Sherringham commended even to extravagance the liberality of such comradeship; said that of course a woman didn't go into that profession to see how little she could swallow. She was right to live with the others so long as they were at all possible, and it was for her, and only for her, to judge how

long that might be. This was rather heroic on Peter's part, for his assumed detachment from the girl's personal life still left him a margin for some forms of uneasiness. It would have made, in his spirit, a great difference for the worse that the woman he loved, and for whom he wished no baser lover than himself, should have embraced the prospect of consorting only with the cheaper kind. It was all very well, but Fanny Rover was simply a *cabotine*, and that sort of association was an odd training for a young woman who was to have been good enough (he couldn't forget that—he kept remembering it as if it might still have a future use) to be his wife. Certainly he ought to have thought of such things before he permitted himself to become so interested in a theatrical nature. His heroism did him service however for the hour: it helped him by the end of the week to feel tremendously broken in to Miriam's little circle. What helped him most indeed was to reflect that she would get tired of a good many of its members herself in time; for it was not that they were shocking (very few of them shone with that intense light), but that they could be trusted in the long run to bore you.

There was a lovely Sunday in particular that he spent almost wholly in Balaklava Place—he arrived so early—when, in the afternoon, all sorts of odd people dropped in. Miriam held a reception in the little garden and insisted on almost all the company's staying to supper. Her mother shed tears to Sherringham, in the desecrated house, because they had accepted, Miriam and she, an invitation—and in Cromwell Road too—for the evening. Miriam decreed that they shouldn't go: they would have much better fun with their

good friends at home. She sent off a message—it was a terrible distance—by a cabman, and Sherringham had the privilege of paying the messenger. Basil Dashwood, in another vehicle, proceeded to an hotel that he knew, a mile away, for supplementary provisions, and came back with a cold ham and a dozen of champagne. It was all very Bohemian and journalistic and picturesque, very supposedly droll and enviable to outsiders; and Miriam told anecdotes and gave imitations of the people she would have met if she had gone out: so no one had a sense of loss—the two occasions were fantastically united. Mrs. Rooth drank champagne for consolation; though the consolation was imperfect when she remembered that she might have drunk it (not quite so much indeed) in Cromwell Road.

Taken in connection with the evening before, the day formed for Sherringham the most complete exhibition he had had of Miriam Rooth. He had been at the theatre, to which the Saturday night happened to have brought the fullest house she had yet played to, and he came early to Balaklava Place, to tell her once again (he had told her half a dozen times the evening before) that, with the excitement of her biggest audience, she had surpassed herself, acted with remarkable intensity. It pleased her to hear it, and the spirit with which she interpreted the signs of the future and, during an hour he spent alone with her, Mrs. Rooth being up-stairs and Basil Dashwood not arrived, treated him to specimens of fictive emotion of various kinds, was beyond any natural abundance that he had yet seen in a woman. The impression could scarcely have been other if she had been playing wild snatches

to him at the piano: the bright, up-darting flame of her talk rose and fell like an improvisation on the keys. Later, all the rest of the day, he was fascinated by the good grace with which she fraternized with her visitors, finding the right words for each, the solvent of incongruities, the right ideas to keep vanity quiet and make humility gay. It was a wonderful expenditure of generous, nervous life. But what Sherringham read in it above all was the sense of success in youth, with the future large, and the action of that force upon all the faculties. Miriam's limited past had yet pinched her enough to make emancipation sweet, and the emancipation had come at last in an hour. She had stepped into her magic shoes, divined and appropriated everything they could give her, become in a day a really original contemporary. Sherringham was of course not less conscious of that than Nick Dormer had been when, in the cold light of his studio, he saw how she had altered.

But the great thing, to his mind and, these first days, the irresistible seduction of the theatre, was that she was a rare incarnation of beauty. Beauty was the principle of everything she did and of the way, unerringly, she did it—an exquisite harmony of line and motion and attitude and tone, what was most general and most characteristic in her performance. Accidents and instincts played together to this end and constituted something which was independent of her talent or of her merit, in a given case, and which in its influence, to Sherringham's imagination, was far superior to any merit and to any talent. It was a supreme infallible felicity, a source of importance, a stamp of absolute value. To see it in operation, to sit within its radius and feel it shift and

revolve and change and never fail, was a corrective to the depression, the humiliation, the bewilderment of life. It transported Sherringham from the vulgar hour and the ugly fact; drew him to something which had no reason but its sweetness, no name nor place save as the pure, the distant, the antique. It was what most made him say to himself: "Oh, hang it, what does it matter?" when he reflected that an *homme sérieux* (as they said in Paris) rather gave himself away (as they said in America) by going every night to the same theatre for all the world to stare. It was what kept him from doing anything but hover round Miriam—kept him from paying any other visits, from attending to any business, from going back to Calcutta Gardens. It was a spell which he shrank intensely from breaking, and the cause of a hundred postponements, confusions and incoherences. It made of the crooked little stucco villa in St. John's Wood a place in the upper air, commanding the prospect; a nest of winged liberties and ironies, hanging far aloft above the huddled town. One should live at altitudes when one could—they braced and simplified; and for a happy interval Sherringham never touched the earth.

It was not that there were no influences tending at moments to drag him down—an abasement from which he escaped only because he was up so high. We have seen that Basil Dashwood could affect him at times like a piece of wood tied to his ankle, through the circumstance that he made Miriam's famous conditions—those of the public exhibition of her genius—seem small and prosaic; so that Sherringham had to remind himself that perhaps this smallness was involved in

their being at all. She carried his imagination off into infinite spaces, whereas she carried Dashwood's only into the box-office and the revival of plays that were barbarously bad. The worst was that it was open to him to believe that a sharp young man who was in the business might know better than he. Another possessor of superior knowledge (he talked, that is, as if he knew better than any one) was Gabriel Nash, who appeared to have abundant leisure to haunt Balaklava Place, or in other words appeared to enjoy the same command of his time as Peter Sherringham. Our young diplomatist regarded him with mingled feelings, for he had not forgotten the contentious character of their first meeting or the degree to which he had been moved to urge upon Nick Dormer's consideration that his talkative friend was probably an ass. This personage turned up now as an admirer of the charming creature he had scoffed at, and there was something exasperating in the quietude of his inconsistency, of which he had not the least embarrassing consciousness. Indeed he had such arbitrary and desultory ways of looking at any question that it was difficult, in vulgar parlance, to have him; his sympathies hummed about like bees in a garden, with no visible plan, no economy in their flight. He thought meanly of the modern theatre and yet he had discovered a fund of satisfaction in the most promising of its exponents; so that Sherringham more than once said to him that he should really, to keep his opinions at all in hand, attach more value to the stage or less to the interesting actress. Miriam made infinitely merry at his expense and treated him as the most abject of her slaves: all of which was worth seeing as an exhibition, on Nash's part,

of the imperturbable. When Sherringham mentally pronounced him impudent he felt guilty of an injustice—Nash had so little the air of a man with something to gain. Nevertheless he felt a certain itching in his boot-toe when his fellow-visitor exclaimed, explicatively (in general to Miriam herself), in answer to a charge of tergiversation: "Oh, it's all right: it's the voice, you know—the enchanting voice!" He meant by this, as indeed he more fully set forth, that he came to the theatre, or to the villa in St. John's Wood, simply to treat his ear to the sound (the richest then to be heard on earth, as he maintained) issuing from Miriam's lips. Its richness was quite independent of the words she might pronounce or the poor fable they might subserve, and if the pleasure of hearing her in public was the greater by reason of the larger volume of her utterance, it was still highly agreeable to see her at home, for it was there that the artistic nature that he freely conceded to her came out most. He spoke as if she had been formed by the bounty of nature to be his particular recreation, and as if, being an expert in innocent joys, he took his pleasure wherever he found it.

He was perpetually in the field, sociable, amiable, communicative, inveterately contradicted but never confounded, ready to talk to any one about anything and making disagreement (of which he left the responsibility wholly to others) a basis of intimacy. Every one knew what he thought of the theatrical profession, and yet it could not be said that he did not regard its members as the exponents of comedy, inasmuch as he often elicited their foibles in a way that made even Sherringham laugh, notwithstanding his attitude of reserve where Nash

was concerned. At any rate, though he had committed himself on the subject of the general fallacy of their attempt, he put up with their company, for the sake of Miriam's accents, with a practical philosophy that was all his own. Miriam pretended that he was her supreme, her incorrigible adorer, masquerading as a critic to save his vanity and tolerated for his secret constancy in spite of being a bore. To Sherringham he was not a bore, and the secretary of embassy felt a certain displeasure at not being able to regard him as one. He had seen too many strange countries and curious things, observed and explored too much to be void of illustration. Peter had a suspicion that if he himself was in the *grandes espaces* Gabriel Nash probably had a still wider range. If among Miriam's associates Basil Dashwood dragged him down, Gabriel challenged him rather to higher and more fantastic flights. If he saw the girl in larger relations than the young actor, who mainly saw her in ill-written parts, Nash went a step further and regarded her, irresponsibly and sublimely, as a priestess of harmony, with whom the vulgar ideas of success and failure had nothing to do. He laughed at her "parts," holding that without them she would be great. Sherringham envied him his power to content himself with the pleasures he could get: he had a shrewd impression that contentment was not destined to be the sweetener of his own repast.

Above all Nash held his attention by a constant element of unstudied reference to Nick Dormer, who, as we know, had suddenly become much more interesting to his cousin. Sherringham found food for observation, and in some measure for

perplexity, in the relations of all these clever people with each other. He knew why his sister, who had a personal impatience of unapplied ideas, had not been agreeably affected by Mr. Nash and had not viewed with complacency a predilection for him in the man she was to marry. This was a side by which he had no desire to resemble Julia Dallow, for he needed no teaching to divine that Gabriel had not set her intelligence in motion. He, Peter, would have been sorry to have to confess that he could not understand him. He understood furthermore that Miriam, in Nick's studio, might very well have appeared to Julia a formidable power. She was younger, but she had quite as much her own form and she was beautiful enough to have made Nick compare her with Mrs. Dallow even if he had been in love with that lady—a pretension as to which Peter had private ideas.

Sherringham for many days saw nothing of the member for Harsh, though it might have been said that, by implication, he participated in the life of Balaklava Place. Had Nick given Julia tangible grounds, and was his unexpectedly fine rendering of Miriam an act of virtual infidelity? In that case in what degree was Miriam to be regarded as an accomplice in his defection, and what was the real nature of this young lady's esteem for her new and (as he might be called) distinguished ally? These questions would have given Peter still more to think about if he had not flattered himself that he had made up his mind that they concerned Nick and Miriam infinitely more than they concerned him. Miriam was personally before him, so that he had no need to consult for his pleasure his fresh recollection of the portrait. But he

thought of this striking production each time he thought of his enterprising kinsman. And that happened often, for in his hearing Miriam often discussed the happy artist and his possibilities with Gabriel Nash, and Gabriel broke out about them to Miriam. The girl's tone on the subject was frank and simple : she only said, with an iteration that was slightly irritating, that Mr. Dormer had been tremendously kind to her. She never mentioned Julia's irruption to Julia's brother ; she only referred to the portrait, with inscrutable amenity, as a direct consequence of Peter's fortunate suggestion that first day at Madame Carré's. Gabriel Nash, however, showed such a disposition to expatiate sociably and luminously on the peculiarly interesting character of what he called Dormer's predicament and on the fine suspense which it was fitted to kindle in the breast of discerning friends, that Peter wondered, as I have already hinted, if this insistence were not a subtle perversity, a devilish little invention to torment a man whose jealousy was presumable. Yet on the whole Nash struck him as but scantily devilish and as still less occupied with the prefigurement of *his* emotions. Indeed, he threw a glamour of romance over Nick ; tossed off such illuminating yet mystifying references to him that Sherringham found himself capable of a magnanimous curiosity, a desire to follow out the chain of events. He learned from Gabriel that Nick was still away, and he felt as if he could almost submit to instruction, to initiation. The rare charm of these unregulated days was troubled—it ceased to be idyllic—when, late on the evening of the second Sunday, he walked away with Gabriel southward from St. John's Wood. For then something came out.

XVIII.

It mattered not so much what the doctors thought (and Sir Matthew Hope, the greatest of them all, had been down twice in one week) as that Mr. Chayter, the omniscient butler, declared with all the authority of his position and his experience that Mr. Carteret was very bad indeed. Nick Dormer had a long talk with him (it lasted six minutes) the day he hurried to Beauclere in response to a telegram. It was Mr. Chayter who had taken upon himself to telegraph, in spite of the presence in the house of Mr. Carteret's nearest relation and only surviving sister, Mrs. Lendon. This lady, a large, mild, healthy woman, with a heavy tread, who liked early breakfasts, uncomfortable chairs and the advertisement-sheet of the *Times*, had arrived the week before and was awaiting the turn of events. She was a widow and lived in Cornwall, in a house nine miles from a station, which had, to make up for this inconvenience, as she had once told Nick, a delightful old herbaceous garden. She was extremely fond of an herbaceous garden; her principal interest was in that direction. Nick had often seen her—she came to Beauclere once or twice a year. Her sojourn there made no great difference; she was only an "Urania dear," for Mr. Carteret to look across the table at when, on the close of dinner, it was time for her to

retire. She went out of the room always as if it were after some one else; and on the gentlemen "joining" her later (the junction was not very close) she received them with an air of gratified surprise.

Chayter honoured Nick Dormer with a regard which approached, without improperly competing with it, the affection his master had placed on the same young head, and Chayter knew a good many things. Among them he knew his place; but it was wonderful how little that knowledge had rendered him inaccessible to other kinds. He took upon himself to send for Nick without speaking to Mrs. Lendon, whose influence was now a good deal like that of a large occasional piece of furniture which had been introduced in case it should be required. She was one of the solid conveniences that a comfortable house would have; but you couldn't talk with a mahogany sofa or a folding-screen. Chayter knew how much she had "had" from her brother, and how much her two daughters had each received on marriage; and he was of the opinion that it was quite enough, especially considering the society in which they (you could scarcely call it) moved. He knew beyond this that they would all have more, and that was why he hesitated little about communicating with Nick. If Mrs. Lendon should be ruffled at the intrusion of a young man who neither was the child of a cousin nor had been formally adopted, Chayter was parliamentary enough to see that the forms of debate were observed. He had indeed a slightly compassionate sense that Mrs. Lendon was not easily ruffled. She was always down an extraordinary time before breakfast (Chayter refused to take it as in the least admonitory), but

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she usually went straight into the garden (as if to see that none of the plants had been stolen in the night), and had in the end to be looked for by the footman in some out-of-the-way spot behind the shrubbery, where, plumped upon the ground, she was doing something "rum" to a flower.

Mr. Carteret himself had expressed no wishes. He slept most of the time (his failure at the last had been sudden, but he was rheumatic and seventy-seven), and the situation was in Chayter's hands. Sir Matthew Hope had opined, even on his second visit, that he would rally and go on, in rudimentary comfort, some time longer; but Chayter took a different and a still more intimate view. Nick was embarrassed: he scarcely knew what he was there for from the moment he could give his good old friend no conscious satisfaction. The doctors, the nurses, the servants, Mrs. Lendon, and above all the settled equilibrium of the square, thick house, where an immutable order appeared to slant through the polished windows and tinkle in the quieter bells, all represented best the kind of supreme solace to which the master was most accessible.

For the first day it was judged better that Nick should not be introduced into the darkened chamber. This was the decision of the two decorous nurses, of whom the visitor had had a glimpse and who, with their black uniforms and fresh faces of business, suggested a combination of the barmaid and the nun. He was depressed, yet restless, felt himself in a false position and thought it lucky Mrs. Lendon had powers of placid acceptance. They were old acquaintances: she treated him with a certain ceremony, but it was not the rigour of mistrust. It was much more an expression of remote

Cornish respect for young abilities and distinguished connections, inasmuch as she asked him a great deal about Lady Agnes and about Lady Flora and Lady Elizabeth. He knew she was kind and ungrudging, and his principal chagrin was the sense of meagre information and of responding poorly in regard to his uninteresting aunts. He sat in the garden with newspapers and looked at the lowered blinds in Mr. Carteret's windows ; he wandered around the abbey with cigarettes and lightened his tread and felt grave, wishing that everything were over. He would have liked much to see Mr. Carteret again, but he had no desire that Mr. Carteret should see him. In the evening he dined with Mrs. Lendon, and she talked to him, at his request and as much as she could, about her brother's early years, his beginnings of life. She was so much younger that they appeared to have been rather a tradition of her own youth ; but her talk made Nick feel how tremendously different Mr. Carteret had been at that period from what he, Nick, was to-day. He had published at the age of thirty a little volume (it was thought wonderfully clever) called "The Incidence of Rates" ; but Nick had not yet collected the material for any such treatise. After dinner Mrs. Lendon, who was in full dress, retired to the drawing-room, where at the end of ten minutes she was followed by Nick, who had remained behind only because he thought Chayter would expect it. Mrs. Lendon almost shook hands with him again, and then Chayter brought in coffee. Almost in no time afterwards he brought in tea, and the occupants of the drawing-room sat for a slow half-hour, during which the lady looked round at the apartment with a sigh

and said: "Don't you think poor Charles had exquisite taste?"

Fortunately at this moment the "local man" was ushered in. He had been up-stairs and he entered, smiling, with the remark: "It's quite wonderful—it's quite wonderful." What was wonderful was a marked improvement in the breathing, a distinct indication of revival. The doctor had some tea and he chatted for a quarter of an hour in a way that showed what a "good" manner and how large an experience a local man could have. When he went away Nick walked out with him. The doctor's house was near by and he had come on foot. He left Nick with the assurance that in all probability Mr. Carteret, who was certainly picking up, would be able to see him on the morrow. Our young man turned his steps again to the abbey and took a stroll about it in the starlight. It never looked so huge as when it reared itself in the night, and Nick had never felt more fond of it than on this occasion, more comforted and confirmed by its beauty. When he came back he was readmitted by Chayter, who surveyed him in respectful deprecation of the frivolity which had led him to attempt to help himself through such an evening in such a way.

Nick went to bed early and slept badly, which was unusual with him; but it was a pleasure to him to be told almost as soon as he came out of his room that Mr. Carteret had asked for him. He went in to see him and was struck with the change in his appearance. He had however spent a day with him just after the New Year, and another at the beginning of March, so that he had perceived the first symptoms of mortal

alteration. A week after Julia Dallow's departure for the Continent Nick had devoted several hours to Beauclere and to the intention of telling his old friend how the happy event had been brought to naught—the advantage that he had been so good as to desire for him and to make the condition of a splendid gift. Before this, for a few days, Nick had been keeping back, to announce it personally, the good news that Julia had at last set their situation in order: he wanted to enjoy the old man's pleasure—so sore a trial had her arbitrary behaviour been for a year. Mrs. Dallow had offered Mr. Carteret a conciliatory visit before Christmas—had come down from London one day to lunch with him, but only with the effect of making him subsequently exhibit to poor Nick, as the victim of her whimsical hardness, a great deal of earnest commiseration in a jocosé form. Upon his honour, as he said, she was as clever and “specious” a woman (this was the odd expression he used) as he had ever seen in his life. The merit of her behaviour on this occasion, as Nick knew, was that she had not been specious at her lover's expense: she had breathed no doubt of his public purpose and had had the feminine courage to say that in truth she was older than he, so that it was only fair to give his affections time to mature. But when Nick saw their sympathizing host after the rupture that I lately narrated he found him in no state to encounter a disappointment: he was seriously ailing, it was the beginning of worse things and no time for trying on a sensation. After this excursion Nick went back to town saddened by Mr. Carteret's now unmistakably settled decline, but rather relieved that he had not been forced to make his confession.

It had even occurred to him that the need for making it might not come up if the ebb of his old friend's strength should continue unchecked. He might pass away in the persuasion that everything would happen as he wished it, though indeed without enriching Nick on his wedding-day to the tune that he had promised. Very likely he had made legal arrangements in virtue of which his bounty would take effect in the right conditions and in them alone. At present Nick had a larger confession to treat him to—the last three days had made the difference; but, oddly enough, though his responsibility had increased his reluctance to speak had vanished: he was positively eager to clear up a situation over which it was not consistent with his honour to leave a shade.

The doctor had been right when he came in after dinner; it was clear in the morning that they had not seen the last of Mr. Carteret's power of picking up. Chayter, who had been in to see him, refused austere to change his opinion with every change in his master's temperature; but the nurses took the cheering view that it would do their patient good for Mr. Dormer to sit with him a little. One of them remained in the room, in the deep window-seat, and Nick spent twenty minutes by the bedside. It was not a case for much conversation, but Mr. Carteret seemed to like to look at him. There was life in his kind old eyes, which would express itself yet in some further wise provision. He laid his liberal hand on Nick's with a confidence which showed it was not yet disabled. He said very little, and the nurse had recommended that the visitor himself should not overflow in speech; but from time to time he murmured with a faint smile: "To-

night's division, you know—you mustn't miss it." There was to be no division that night, as it happened, but even Mr. Carteret's aberrations were parliamentary. Before Nick left him he had been able to assure him that he was rapidly getting better, that such valuable hours must not be wasted. "Come back on Friday, if they come to the second reading." These were the words with which Nick was dismissed, and at noon the doctor said the invalid was doing very well, but that Nick had better leave him alone for that day. Our young man accordingly determined to go up to town for the night and even, if he should receive no summons, for the next day. He arranged with Chayter that he should be telegraphed to if Mr. Carteret were either better or worse.

"Oh, he can't very well be worse, sir," Chayter replied, inexorably; but he relaxed so far as to remark that of course it wouldn't do for Nick to neglect the House.

"Oh, the House!" Nick sighed, ambiguously, avoiding the butler's eye. It would be easy enough to tell Mr. Carteret, but nothing would have sustained him in the effort to make a clean breast to Chayter.

He might be ambiguous about the House, but he had the sense of things to be done awaiting him in London. He telegraphed to his servant and spent that night in Rosedale Road. The things to be done were apparently to be done in his studio: his servant met him there with a large bundle of letters. He failed that evening to stray within two miles of Westminster, and the legislature of his country reassembled without his support. The next morning he received a telegram from Chayter, to whom he had given Rosedale Road as an

address. This missive simply informed him that Mr. Carteret wished to see him, and it seemed to imply that he was better, though Chayter wouldn't say so. Nick again took his place in the train to Beaulere. He had been there very often, but it was present to him that now, after a little, he should go only once more, for a particular dismal occasion. All that was over—everything that belonged to it was over. He learned on his arrival—he saw Mrs. Lendon immediately—that his old friend had continued to pick up. He had expressed a strong and a perfectly rational desire to talk with Nick, and the doctor had said that if it was about anything important it was much better not to oppose him. “He says it's about something very important,” Mrs. Lendon remarked, resting shy eyes on him while she added that *she* was looking after her brother for the hour. She had sent those wonderful young ladies out to see the abbey. Nick paused with her outside of Mr. Carteret's door. He wanted to say something comfortable to her in return for her homely charity—give her a hint, which she was far from looking for, that practically he had now no interest in her brother's estate. This was impossible of course. Her absence of irony gave him no pretext, and such an allusion would be an insult to her simple discretion. She was either not thinking of his interest at all, or she was thinking of it with the tolerance of a mind trained to a hundred decent submissions. Nick looked for an instant into her mild, uninvestigating eyes, and it came over him supremely that the goodness of these people was singularly pure: they were a part of what was cleanest and sanest and dullest in humanity. There had been just a little mocking

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inflection in Mrs. Lendon's pleasant voice ; but it was dedicated to the young ladies in the black uniforms (she could perhaps be satirical about *them*), and not to the theory of the "importance" of Nick's interview with her brother. Nick's arrested desire to let her know he was not dangerous translated itself into a vague friendliness and into the abrupt, rather bewildering words : "I can't tell you half the good I think of you." As he passed into Mr. Carteret's room it occurred to him that she would perhaps interpret this speech as an acknowledgment of obligation—of her good-nature in not keeping him away from the rich old man.

END OF VOLUME II.

